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LIFESAVER!

Apparently Kayyim had come to the end of his speech for there was a scattering of applause that gradually built in intensity. Kayyim nodded in acknowledgment and had turned away from the podium, about to reclaim his seat.

Harry kept his eyes on the man in the white sports coat. He was not applauding. One hand had slipped under his coat. Harry leaned forward, hoping for a, better look. But a man just in front of his suspect had abruptly risen from his chair, blocking Harry's view.

Then he caught sight of him again. He was fully erect, his arm extended. The sun caught a metal object in his hand and glinted off it. Harry wasted no time. He sprang from his seat and into action!

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DIRTY HARRY #10

The Blood of Strangers

Dane Hartman

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DIRTY HARRY #10

THE BLOOD OF STRANGERS

Opening Round

He was a small man with nothing to distinguish him, so when he wandered into the international terminal at four-thirty in the morning, no one paid him the least bit of attention. Of course, there weren't many people around at this sad gray hour: a few custodians, a bored security man with a Styrofoam cup of coffee in his hand, and a Venezualan couple who had somehow become stranded and were now waiting for a six-thirty flight to the destination they'd expected to reach the night before.

The Small Man carried with him a worn gray satchel, which also was not unusual. The gray satchel, however, contained an elegantly constructed bomb with a timing device which would have been considered unusual.

Within hours, the terminal would be packed, as travellers flooded into it, dragging with them children, pets, and bulky luggage. Certainly by eleven, it was likely that the terminal would be as crowded as it was ever going to get.

The Small Man had been here before, reconnoitering the area at all times of day and night. He compiled the data he required in order that the operation would have maximum effect. Not only was the exact hour important; where the bomb was to be placed was a matter of equal significance.

In this case, the most strategic location was also the simplest. The Small Man sat down on a bench and pretended to be resting his feet. Unobtrusively, he slipped the satchel beneath the bench, waited for a few moments longer, then continued on his way.

He was confident that the satchel would not be disturbed. Having surveyed the terminal in advance, he knew that the cleaning crew had already come and gone and that no one was scheduled to mop or carry out a search for forgotten baggage for several hours.

He proceeded through the complex of terminal buildings until he reached the lot where his friend, Machito, was waiting in a green Chevy. It was parked, with the motor running, far from the glare of the sodium lights.

Machito quickly started the vehicle when he saw the Small Man approach. Machito was too nervous and too high strung. No matter that he had conducted similar operations like this in Central America

and in Europe, he lacked the stamina for such assignments.

"How did it go?"

The Small Man shrugged. "What could be the problem? It is no big thing. I put a bomb under a bench. I walk away. What could go wrong?"

"Plenty," muttered Machito, "plenty. I have seen so much in my time."

The Small Man wasn't interested. He had worked with Machito before, and the way life was, he would probably work again with Machito. He had heard all he wanted about him. He knew his history and his nervous condition backwards and forwards.

The Chevy shot out of the lot with a screech of rubber and a noisy shifting of gears. The Chevy was dependable even so and Machito had a way with it.

The Small Man remarked that he was going too fast.

Machito grinned. It was blinding to look at him when his teeth were bared like this; there was more gold in his mouth than in Fort Knox.

With so little traffic on 101, Machito could not resist accelerating, putting as much distance as possible between them and the airport though the bomb would not go off for many hours yet.

Machito was talking but the Small Man wasn't listening. He was tired and kept dozing off, having no interest in Machito's philosophy of life. Which was why he didn't realize until it was too late, that there was a squad car in back of them. At first, there was only a flashing red light but when it became apparent that Machito had no intention of pulling over, a siren began to scream as well.

It was the siren that woke the Small Man and it took him several moments to orient himself.

The squad car was gaining on them. Looking back, the Small Man saw two cops, one of whom was insistently gesturing them over to the side. Otherwise the road was deserted.

"Pull over," commanded the Small Man.

Machito, who had his foot pressed way down on the gas, regarded the Small Man as though he'd taken leave of his senses. "What do you mean pull over? The car is stolen, man. Once they find out, we are fucked."

The Small Man's face was impassive—and unreadable. "You let me worry about that. Pull over."

Machito protested again, but this was the Small Man's show and he did as he was asked.

It took some time before he could slow the Chevy enough to stop it.

The squad car came to a halt directly behind it. Gravel flew up in the air with the intrusion of eight tires.

They were local cops, the Small Man saw right off. That made sense; they had probably entered the city limits a few miles back.

One of them got out of the car slowly, as though he had all the time in the world, and walked up to the Chevy. He rapped on the window on the driver's side.

Machito threw a sidelong glance at his companion.

"Open it, man, do as he says."

Machito rolled the window down. There was a forlorn expression on his face that reminded the Small Man of a starving dog.

The cop was all business. "License, please?"

Machito had a license. An international one.

The cop scrutinized it with his flashlight. He hadn't been expecting an international driver's license and seemed not to know exactly what to make of it. "Registration?"

Machito was too paralyzed to react or even to speak. The Small Man then opened the glove compartment and pulled out a registration. He handed it to the cop.

Naturally, the name on Machito's license and the name on the registration had nothing to do with each other.

"Are you David Lisker?"

The Small Man shook his head. "David's a friend of ours. We borrowed his car."

The cop looked every bit as dubious as the Small Man figured he would.

"Do you realize you were clocked doing ninety-two miles an hour in a fifty-five mile an hour zone?"

Machito acted surprised. "I am so sorry, I wasn't keeping track. I will not let it happen again."

Not disposed to believe him, the cop said he would be back momentarily.

"What are you going to do?"

"I just have to check something out, Mr. Sanchez."

Sanchez was the name on the driver's license. Like the car, it belonged to someone else.

Machito turned to the Small Man. "What happens now?"

The Small Man reached over the back to remove a .45 automatic from the jacket lying on the seat.

“I will be back in a moment,” he said and while Machito watched with horrified fascination, he calmly walked towards the squad car. Its signal light was still flashing, making gaudy patterns on the darkened roadway.

“Excuse me, officer,” the Small Man said, keeping his weapon out of sight.

The cop had his window open and his radio on, filling the air with static and the voices of various dispatchers. Undoubtedly, he was waiting for the registration number to be processed by computer. It wouldn’t take long. In a minute or so, he’d learn that the Chevy was stolen.

“What is it?”

The Small Man noted that the second cop was too bored or else too tired to pay close attention to what was happening. The Small Man was very good at what he did. He had such an air of serenity about him that apprehension was the last thing a person would feel in his presence.

“I just wanted to explain something about this registration you have . . .”

“Oh, and what’s that?”

He pointed to it, causing the cop to look down. At that moment, in one quick motion, he raised the .45 and without hesitation discharged it.

There wasn’t much noise because of the silencer. The cop lurched forward in his seat, and then sagged to the right so he fell across his partner. His brains were scattered across the back of the seat. The Small Man gave his partner no opportunity to react and shot him squarely in the face.

The face seemed to fall away. An eye disintegrated. But the cop was not dead. The Small Man fired a second time, completing the execution.

Retrieving the license and registration, he abandoned the squad car just as the dispatcher was announcing that the Chevy in question was stolen. The men believed to have taken it were “armed and extremely dangerous.”

“Announcing Pan American Flight 908, for Honolulu and Tokyo, scheduled to depart at 11:45, now receiving passengers at Gate

Twelve. Please have your passports and boarding passes ready for inspection. That's Pan American Flight 908, for Honolulu and Tokyo, scheduled to depart at . . ."

Several tourists as well as a scattering of somberly dressed Japanese businessmen began gathering their paraphernalia, their cameras and carry-on luggage, in response to the announcement which had given way to Muzak.

They only partially accounted for the large number of people assembled in the waiting area for departure to Anchorage, Sydney, Bangkok, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Peking. Among them were tourist groups who looked to their leaders for guidance as they contemplated vast and exhausting journeys to faraway destinations.

The digital clocks showed that it was 11:22:40.

A young married couple had taken a place on a bench located not far from the middle of the terminal. They had been married by a justice of the peace in Phoenix, Arizona three days before and were on a honeymoon trip that would take them first to Hong Kong. They were looking forward to a week of sightseeing and bargain hunting and perhaps even some casino gambling in nearby Macao.

The woman wasn't pretty but she was clearly the sort that a man would feel safe in bringing home to his family. "I feel that we've been running nonstop since Saturday," she said, and she did look tired. "It'll be nice when we can settle into our hotel and not have to move anymore."

To take the pressure off her feet, she slipped off her pumps. Swinging her left leg back and forth, her heel hit a bag of some kind underneath the seat.

Puzzled, she glanced down and saw a gray satchel. "Is that yours, Fred?"

Fred was preoccupied, admiring the passage of a delectable young thing across the floor. "What was that, dear?"

"This isn't yours, is it?"

She pulled out the satchel so that he could get a better glimpse of it.

The digital clocks indicated that it was now 11:24:03.

Fred shook his head. "That old thing, are you kidding?"

The woman glanced around but there was no one anywhere in the vicinity who looked like they might own it. "Maybe we should take it to the claims department, somebody might have forgotten it."

"I don't know, it's probably better to leave it where it is."

At that instant there was a chime, then a woman's mellifluous voice:

“Announcing TWA Flight 760 to Hong Kong via Honolulu, Taipei and Manila, now receiving passengers at Gate Eight. Please have your boarding passes and passports ready. TWA Flight 760 . . .”

“That’s us, honey,” Fred said, stooping down to gather up his checkered Vuitton case.

“Thank God, at last,” his wife sighed, although in fact, the flight was right on time. It was exactly 11:25:30.

“Have you got everything?”

Fred was impatient, being the sort who believes that a delay of a minute is disastrous.

“I think so.”

The woman worried her feet back into her pink pumps.

“Got the health certificates?”

“Yes, they’re right here.” She didn’t like him checking up on every little thing. What kind of marriage was this going to be? she wondered. She held them up for him to see. He nodded, apparently satisfied. It was now 11:26:00.

Which was when the ingenious device in the satchel, triggered by a simple alarm clock, was set to go off.

The first thing it did as it detonated was to rip through the vinyl bench, sending bits and pieces flying to all ends of the terminal. The second thing it did was to blow apart the newly married couple and their luggage, sending bits and pieces of them flying to all ends of the terminal. And that was only the beginning . . .

CHAPTER

One

The smoke was slow to clear from the interior of the terminal even though firemen had spent close to two hours extinguishing the blaze. Yet already the extent of the damage was becoming obvious to the various investigators who'd hastened to the scene of the blast.

Half the ceiling had come crashing down and a jagged gaping hole left in its place revealed an incongruously blue sky. The vinyl benches blown apart were now globular heaps, pulverized into such weird shapes that they resembled the sort of sculpture one would expect to find in the Museum of Art on McAllister Street. Of the row of airline counters, nothing was left intact; their metal was twisted and torn apart, and the signs that had proclaimed their identities dangled mockingly over the rubble. In the middle of the floor was a vast crater that looked like it might, at any moment, swallow up whatever was left whole in the wreckage.

But the physical damage was minor compared with the destruction of human life for those who were unfortunate enough to be in the vicinity of the bomb when it exploded. The total number of casualties was not yet known; this was because several of the bodies had been so dismembered that barring a forensic analysis, no one was able to say just how many dead there were. Even hours after the explosion, investigators were still finding severed arms, legs, and feet—and in one instance, the head of a middle-aged man whose neck had been cauterized by the intensity of the heat—that had landed far from where their owners had been standing.

About the floors and the walls, were large swaths of dried blood that were easily distinguished against the charred backdrop.

It was difficult to linger for long inside the bombed-out terminal. Not only was there a problem with the smoke but there was also the noxiously sweet odor of death, the mixture of blood and cooked flesh.

Sirens continued to scream in the distance. From elsewhere in the airport, which had been completely evacuated, dogs could be heard barking. No further chances were being taken. Several officers from the bomb squad were searching the complex for additional devices. Though no one had ever understood what it was about explosives that aroused a dog's olfactory nerves no one questioned the ability of such

a trained animal to ferret them out. In this case however, they were just a little too late.

There was no mistaking Timothy McFadden Connelly. He had all the outward markings of an FBI agent. Possibly, there was an FBI boutique somewhere that outfitted each agent with the same brand trenchcoats, shades, shoes, and wristwatches. In all likelihood, it was located next door to the barber shop where they all received the same haircuts. He was a strapping man who carried himself so erectly that it strained the back just to look at him.

More by virtue of his posture than his height, he seemed to tower over Lieutenant Bressler. Bressler had an unhappy look on his face. And why shouldn't he? He didn't want any part of this mess. Only last night, he'd been awakened by a call that two of his men had been slain on the shoulder of Route 101 by unknown assailants who were presumed to have stolen a '73 green Chevrolet. The car had been found abandoned. Where the assailants had gone was anyone's guess.

But the loss of two cops, while grievous, paled by comparison to this catastrophe. It was certainly one of the worst in the city's history. The total so far: ten dead, thirty-six injured, eight seriously. And it was entirely conceivable the toll would double before the day was over.

Somebody else should be handling this, thought Bressler. But it was summer and the Commissioner and several of his immediate superiors were in Washington attending a police officers convention. Washington, he thought ruefully, they should be here where crime was going on, not in the nation's capital talking about it.

If Bressler looked mournful, Connelly evinced no emotion at all. Neither the grisly aspect of his surroundings, nor the noxious odors seemed to bother him.

"This is going to get a lot bigger," Connelly said quite unexpectedly. "It'll get bigger, then it'll get out of hand."

"And that doesn't disturb you?"

"Sure it disturbs me, sure it does. But I am not certain there's much we can do about it."

"You don't sound optimistic." Bressler didn't have much faith in the FBI. In this instance, however, he wouldn't mind if the agency got the credit. Just so long as the burden of this case was lifted from him.

"I'm not. I've handled similar things before. The Omega people, the FALN, the Weathermen in the Sixties . . . I can spot professionals. The only thing that surprises me is that we haven't gotten any calls yet claiming responsibility. With something like this you generally find

half a dozen organizations—some you figure are made up on the spur of the moment—saying that the bomb was theirs and if you don't look out, they'll strike again."

"There'll be calls," Bressler said. "You wait and see."

"I suppose so. They might not be to your people though. In my experience, these terrorists prefer to work the media. The Simbionese Liberation Front—the one that inducted Patty Hearst—they knew how to play the media. They get better at it all the time. So the calls might be coming into your newspapers, your t.v. stations especially."

"That reminds me, what do we tell the press? They're outside clamoring for news."

Connelly's view was that one should say as little to the press as possible. "In this case that shouldn't be hard. What do you know about this bombing?"

Bressler conceded that it wasn't much.

"So there's your answer."

Bressler would ordinarily have relied on the official police department spokesman. But this was not the sort of thing that could be left to a spokesman.

Corralled into a roped-off area established by the police, the representatives of the media were dismayed that so far they'd been denied access to the site of the blast. Moreover, the official news bulletins had been both stale and evasive. If these reporters were not placated soon, they were liable to start a revolt of their own.

While the majority of the reporters and photographers seemed unwilling to defy the police, there was one who had absolutely no intention of waiting any longer.

Suddenly, the rope was down and a woman, followed by a soundman and a cameraman, was striding resolutely toward the devastated terminal.

The woman was very good looking and wearing a skirt that slit provocatively along its bias. She was something of a local celebrity too, having anchored the evening news for KCVO-TV, on and off for the last three years. The officer who attempted to stop her, called to her by name, which was something he couldn't have done with any of the other restless members of the press gathered in front of him.

"Miss Winston, please, you're not allowed beyond this point!"

If Ellie Winston heard him, and she probably did, it was clear that she was not about to obey him.

There was only one other officer assigned to keeping the

newspeople quarantined and he rushed toward her. How he intended to block her and the pair of men behind her was not immediately apparent. In any case, it was too late.

Seeing that Ellie had broken free, the others followed, flailing their cameras and cassette recorders as though they were weapons. They looked like settlers starting out on the Oklahoma land rush.

Connelly, with Bressler at his side, was just emerging from the terminal when the army of reporters came marching down on them.

"This wasn't supposed to happen," Bressler muttered. "I gave orders that this wasn't supposed to happen."

Connelly was his usual imperturbable self. "Handle it," he said and slipped away, intent on avoiding any embarrassing questions.

Now additional officers moved to halt the invasion, forming a protective ring about the terminal. But Ellie Winston kept right on going.

"Miss Winston, please," one of them pleaded. "We can't let anyone in there until the preliminary investigation is completed."

As he spoke, he did not realize that the cameras had turned on him and were in the process of filming. When he looked up into the glare of their lights, his words grew halting and suddenly he fell silent altogether. Ellie thrust a microphone toward him.

"Is there anything else you care to add?"

"Not my job," he mumbled and retreated from the camera's intimidating eye.

So Ellie searched for another victim and found him in the person of Lieutenant Bressler. Bressler glanced uneasily about, hoping for relief, but there was no help in sight. He had to do this one on his own.

"Lieutenant, do you have any idea who might be responsible for this carnage?"

"Miss Winston, I am prepared to make a statement to the press. I am not prepared to take individual questions."

"Is the police department taking any special measures to make certain something like this does not happen again?" Ellie found that by ignoring hostile responses she was often able to get her point across—if not to the interviewee at least to her audience.

"Miss Winston . . ." Bressler's voice betrayed his exhaustion.

Others were now shouting out their questions and Bressler turned to confront them. As he did so, Ellie took advantage of his distraction and slipped behind the police barricade, which consisted only of a few hastily positioned wooden props. The sound and camera men followed

in her footsteps.

Once inside the airport proper, she was not halted, mainly because everyone assumed that she had permission to be there. And that was how Ellie Winston obtained her exclusive.

When Bressler learned of what she'd done, he was helpless to put a stop to it. By the time he'd issued orders to oust her from the premises she was already gone. Apart from trying to get a court injunction to halt the showing of her footage on that evening's news or subpoenaing the tape, legal maneuvers of doubtful constitutionality, there was not much that he could do.

He considered denying her a press pass in the future or cancelling the one she now possessed. He pondered ways of making sure KCVO would be the last station to know of late-breaking developments in this case, or in any other for that matter. He even toyed with the idea of harassing her with parking tickets and tickets for moving violations and tickets for littering and loitering, even crossing the street against the light. But none of these stratagems seemed fully satisfying to him. None quite had the right measure of revenge he wanted. Finally, it came to him. He began by placing a call to her.

"KCVO-TV, please hold."

The operator's voice sounded like a robot programmed to suggest that it was a sweet Southern belle. When she came back on the line, he asked for Ellie Winston.

"She's in editing. I'll put you through."

When the call came through Ellie was watching herself on a video screen as she had appeared an hour and a half previously, describing the damage inflicted on the airport terminal. No explanation was really necessary because the cameras had clearly recorded the enormity of the destruction. Her commentary was surely not intended to please the police department. "Given their noncommittal responses and ambiguous statements," she had said, "it is fair to say that it will be some time before the perpetrators of this outrage are brought to justice."

She stopped the tape to pick up the phone. She was surprised to hear from Bressler but she kept her voice even.

"What can I do for you, Lieutenant?"

Expecting a vehement denouncement, she was not at all prepared for what followed.

"Actually, Miss Winston, it's what I can do for you. Since you seem so eager to keep abreast of our investigation, I am going to give you

an unprecedented opportunity."

"Oh?" she said suspiciously.

"I am ready to grant you permission to ride with one of our most competent inspectors. You can take along your crew if you'd like and record whatever you see. The only stipulation is that you are in no way to interfere with the performance of his duties."

Ellie was stunned by the offer. There had to be a hitch, she was thinking, but it was not at all apparent. "Why are you doing this?" Might as well be out front, she thought, even if he isn't going to be.

"Miss Winston, we want the public to see that we are doing everything possible to solve this case. The best way this can be accomplished is for you to get to know how our men operate in the field. It's as simple as that."

"All right, your offer is accepted. Now tell me, who is the lucky gentleman?"

"He's a homicide detective. Inspector Callahan. Harry Callahan."

"And how do I find him?"

"I'll get back to you by this afternoon and give you all the necessary details."

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

"Any time, Miss Winston."

What's the hitch?, she continued to wonder as she put down the phone. There's got to be a hitch. After what she'd pulled that morning, the last thing she'd anticipated from the SFPD were unsolicited favors. She had the distinct impression that she was getting in way over her head. Who was Callahan anyway?

CHAPTER

Two

The three men were impeccably dressed in black dinner jackets. They had no difficulty fitting in with the other fashionably attired guests who circulated through the lobby of the Mark Hopkins Hotel. The only reason one would notice them was because of the masks pulled over their faces, with only slits for the eyes to show through, and because of the automatics they produced as they drew up to the reservations desk.

No one could say exactly where they'd come from, whether they'd walked right in through the front door or whether they'd been in the lobby for a while—a more likely possibility—waiting for the opportune moment to don their masks and strike.

True to the formal nature of their attire, they acted deferential, almost as if in apology for the mischief they were about to commit.

Two of the masked men turned their guns on the guests who were in the lobby at the time. They must have numbered at least thirty-five. It was a busy evening hour and several parties were on their way up to the Top of the Mark for cocktails and dinner and an unsurpassed panorama of the city at sunset. The way things were developing, they would not make it in time to view this particular sunset.

The third member of the group remained with his back to the lobby, his interest focused solely on the astonished reservations clerk who stood behind the desk.

It was this man who addressed the assembled captives.

"Now, no one make a sound, please, there's no necessity for panic. I assure you, we have no intention of harming anyone, so long as you offer us your full cooperation. If you will throw all your valuables on the floor in front of you, your wallets, your watches, your jewelry, we will be able to get this over with quickly and you can be on your way. We would rather not have to personally search each of you, but of course, if you don't comply we will be compelled to do so."

His declaration was delivered in calm, measured tones. He seemed to be an articulate and well-educated man and one very much in control of himself.

There was a faint murmur of protest that rose from among the

victims, but that was all. No one doubted the effectiveness of the weapons directed at them.

Now to the clerk facing him at the desk, the third man said, “Please, would you mind opening the safe and relieving it of its contents for me?”

The clerk was a middle-aged man with an air of scrupulousness about him. He drew himself erect and glowered at the masked thief in front of him.

“I do not have the combination, sir,” he announced with great dignity.

“In that case, you will have to obtain it, won’t you? And do so immediately.”

The clerk was deliberating. The robber sensed that he was procrastinating for a definite reason, probably thinking that it could not be too much longer before the robbery was discovered and the police alerted. It was likely that there was a silent alarm underneath the desk, just within the clerk’s reach, which he was prepared to trigger. All he needed was the opportunity—a moment’s distraction in which to move—but the robber meant to deny him that opportunity.

A few seconds passed. The only sound came from the wallets falling to the floor and jewelry clinking as frightened women removed necklaces, rings, and bracelets.

“I am waiting,” said the third man, “and I am becoming impatient.”

The clerk took hold of the phone. “I have to call for the combination,” he explained.

The third man refused to believe this was necessary. Even if it was, he wasn’t going to risk it. He tore the phone from the clerk, ripping the cord out in the process.

He then raised his gun so that the tip of it was resting against the clerk’s neck. “Open the safe, please.”

The clerk’s eyes moved from side to side in desperation.

Reluctantly he turned, yet he was keeping close to the edge of the counter. His right hand was out of sight, but the robber caught a sudden movement, the slight jerk of his shoulder suggesting he’d triggered the alarm.

“You set off the alarm, didn’t you?” he said, his voice ominously calm.

He then seized the clerk by his jacket lapels and pulled him toward him.

With a great show of indignation, the clerk insisted that he had not,

but the confidence was gone from his voice.

"I am afraid that I must contradict you."

The clerk seemed prepared to assert his innocence anew but the robber gave him no time, slamming the butt-end of his gun against his jaw. The blow resulted in a large gash that extended nearly all around the victim's neck. In response, the clerk staggered back, and crumpled in pain.

The suddenness of violence shocked those who might not have believed that the robbers had actually intended to use force. Several people screamed, but the sight of the robbers' guns caused them to fall silent almost immediately.

Up until this point, two of the men had experienced no resistance whatsoever. With admirable efficiency, they had circulated through the lobby, dropping assorted valuables into a white laundry bag. Whenever they suspected that someone might not have been completely forthcoming, they would frisk him—or her, for they weren't bound by propriety if there was a chance of discovering a diamond ring concealed inside a brassiere. Usually, this was unnecessary. Rather than suffer any such indignity, people were voluntarily relieving themselves of items like money clips and silver lighters that might at first have escaped detection.

Whenever a newcomer would enter the hotel, he too would be forced to join the others and drop his portable wealth into the ever-burgeoning laundry bag. Once inside, there was no chance to reconsider and back out. From the outside, however, there was no way for the unsuspecting to realize what was transpiring in the lobby. It looked as though there were a large number of people milling about.

But now that the alarm had been triggered, there was no doubt that it was necessary to speed up the operation. The robbers were loathe to leave anything behind in haste and they displayed no panic in their movements, especially since they did not want to do anything to encourage mutiny among the ranks of their victims.

There was no way for the dispatcher to know, of course, what was happening at the Mark Hopkins. He simply alerted all units in the Nob Hill area to exercise caution in answering the alarm.

Two cruisers were immediately on the scene. They pulled up quietly, careful to avoid use of their sirens. As additional insurance, they parked their black and whites a short distance away from the twenty-floor hotel so that they wouldn't be seen from the lobby entrance.

With their Smith & Wesson .356 Magnums drawn, the four officers approached the hotel, but relaxed as they came within sight of the entrance. There was no evidence of commotion, of disarray, or violence that might signal an emergency situation. There were still people going inside. What the police did not instantly pick up on was that no one was coming out.

It was possible that the alarm had been tripped by accident or that some malfunction had occurred that had set it off. This sort of thing was not at all uncommon.

The first thing that the police saw when they entered the hotel lobby, was a crowd of people standing frozen in place. Their faces reflected their terror and one old man was actually sobbing. No one was saying a word.

There was no question that something was wrong, but in those first few seconds, none of the policemen could say what exactly it was for there were no gunmen in sight. They had dropped down behind the counter, but not so low they couldn't keep an eye on their victims or would-be rescuers.

"What's happening here?" one of the officers cried out.

At which point, the robber who was most obviously in charge of this operation rose from behind the counter, his gun trained on the man who'd just spoken.

"I would suggest, officer, that you throw down your weapon," he said politely, but with a conviction that he would most certainly be obeyed.

Before any of the police could bring themselves to respond, the robber spoke again. "My friends are here with me and should you attempt to use any force, we will be obliged to make these innocent people here suffer for your stupidity."

This threat caused several of the guests to gasp. It was bad enough being robbed; it was far worse to be caught in the middle of a cross fire.

One officer looked to the other, each hoping that the other would produce an inspired solution to extricate them from this stalemated situation. But no one had an inspiration and they realized they had no alternative but to comply with the demand of the gunmen.

Just then, the dispatcher's voice could be heard all the way across the lobby. One of the policemen lowered his eyes to the two-way radio he held in his hand. The robbers could not hear what the dispatcher had said, but they guessed that she was inquiring as to what the officers had found, if anything. And when the young cop

with the radio responded, after a moment's hesitation, they could not hear him either. He had spoken quietly, and in code which he repeated twice for emphasis.

But while the robbers might not have known the meaning of the code, they were reasonably certain that he was alerting the dispatcher to the fact that a robbery was in progress and that an emergency situation existed.

One of the robbers reacted by shooting the cop. He wasn't thinking of strategy. It was an instinctive response. The cop wasn't wearing a bullet-proof vest, otherwise he would have suffered nothing more than a bruise. Instead, he was thrown against the opposite wall, a hole in his chest that barely hinted at the enormous damage done to his left lung.

Now there was utter tumult. The three officers who had just dropped their guns lunged for them again. The forty-odd people trapped inside the lobby began to run in all directions, fleeing for whatever cover was available or else heading for the elevators in hopes of finding refuge on other floors.

The robbers had not wanted this to happen; it was out of their control now, and they would have to fight their way to freedom. But however much chaos ensued, they made sure always to keep an eye on the laundry bag stuffed with valuables. Without that, they wouldn't have much to show for their efforts.

"Victor Two, Victor Two." The dispatcher's voice blasted out of the radio. There was an urgency to the call that Harry did not usually detect since emergencies were, after all, simply a part of a day's work to the dispatcher.

"This is Victor Two," Harry said, taking hold of the mike.

"We have a possible 1080 at the Mark Hopkins. Four officers are on the scene but we've lost communication with them. Backup assistance is being requested from all units in the area."

"This is some kind of day," Harry muttered, thinking of the disasters that had already befallen the city and its police force within the preceding twelve hours. "All right, this is Victor Two, 10-40."

Harry was on O'Farrell and he swung south toward Nob Hill. It took him only a few minutes to arrive on the scene and by then the streets surrounding the Mark Hopkins were already filled with radio cars, their lights blinking, their sirens creating a furious din. There was obviously no need for discretion now. The trio who'd invaded the hotel were undoubtedly expecting them.

Ellie Winston was a woman who lacked patience. Which was one of the reasons she'd gone into the news business. Something was always happening twenty-four hours a day and she had attained a position that insured she would be in on it whenever she wanted.

She was bright and pretty and efficient and—if her detractors were to be believed—somewhat ruthless. She was apt to use her good looks and her abundant charm to ensnare the unwary. And it was true that she would often overlook the niceties of civilized behavior if it meant that she could gain access to a good story. But above all she was impatient. She was thirty-one years old and she had the feeling that if she didn't move quickly enough, everything would fall apart on her. There would be other women behind her, she realized, and maybe they'd be more intelligent than she, more articulate and more determined, and the day would come when they'd overtake her. The men in power might one day decide that she'd gone too far and cut her down to a size they felt more appropriate. And then there were her own insecurities and self-doubts, the sense she had sometimes that she did not deserve her good fortune and status as a local celebrity who might soon—so the rumors went—be selected by one of the networks to anchor the national news desk in New York.

So it was in an effort to keep up with an ongoing story—and possibly to stay ahead of it—that Ellie had abandoned the editing she should have been doing to monitor the police band radio in the newsroom. It was possible, she thought, that she would be able to discover this Harry Callahan's whereabouts on her own without having to wait for Bressler to call back.

But she was getting far more than she bargained for. From the various exchanges taking place between the dispatcher and several units throughout the downtown area, it was clear that something very unusual was happening at the Mark Hopkins.

"Get a crew together," she instructed one of her assistants, "and do it fast. We're checking this one out."

Already phone calls were coming in, confirming that a very conspicuous police presence was making itself visible in the Nob Hill area. Ellie was becoming anxious that another news team would arrive there first and get the most dramatic footage, cheating her of another exclusive. That she had already had one exclusive that day, in the wreckage of the airline terminal, meant nothing to her. Each story was new, each story was a challenge, and a dozen victories did not make up for one loss.

But before she could get up from her desk, the phone rang.

"Jimmy," she called to one of her colleagues, "would you get that,

please? I've got to get out of here."

The man she'd addressed as Jimmy took the call, then turned back to her, "I think you ought to take it, Ellie."

"Not now. Take a message and I'll get back to whoever it is."

"I'm serious, Ellie. It's about the bombing this morning."

She grabbed the phone but before picking up, signalled to Jimmy to start the recorder going.

"Hello, this is Ellie Winston, who am I speaking to, please?"

"My name is not important," said a man in a voice that had a slight accent, but just what kind of accent Ellie could not immediately discern. "All that matters is that I am a representative of the Alpha Group. This morning we destroyed the international terminal at San Francisco Airport and while we deeply regret the loss of life that resulted, we must point out that in this war there are no innocent victims, there can never be innocent victims. Without violence, we would remain ignored or ridiculed. We cannot allow that, do you understand? We are striking for the rights of oppressed peoples everywhere, for those who suffer from exploitation and the imperialism of the United States and its big business surrogates. Tomorrow you shall receive a manifesto which will state our objectives and offer a resolution to the problem confronting us. All the news media will have this manifesto in their hands by noon. All the news media will be obliged to publicize our manifesto without comment, without alteration, or otherwise we cannot be held responsible for the consequences. Is that understood?"

Unable to get a word in edgewise throughout the anonymous caller's entire statement, Ellie now said, "I am not sure anything's understood."

"It will be," the caller said cryptically. "Good day, Miss Winston."

"Now, wait a min . . ."

It was too late. He had already hung up.

"Did you get that, Jimmy?"

The assistant dutifully pressed rewind, then the play button. He'd gotten all of it.

"And what do you make of it?"

"I think he's crazy. What the hell is the Alpha Group?"

"Beats me, never heard of It before."

"You think he's for real?"

"I think so, somehow I do."

"Should I call the police and let them know we've received this call?"

Ellie considered this for a moment. "Just sit tight on it until I get back. You could try calling a couple of the other stations though, feel them out, see if they received similar calls. That way we'll know how to play it on this evening's news."

The phone rang again. Jimmy knew enough to answer it this time.

"Ellie, your camera crew's waiting downstairs," he said.

"Wish me luck."

She was out the door before he could wish her anything.

The *gentlemen bandits,* as they were known in those cities where, with impeccable manners, they had carried off many hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of cash and jewelry, were no longer able to maintain their image. Instead, they were hunkered down behind the reservations counter of the Mark Hopkins, repeatedly firing their automatics. Their first targets, naturally, had been the three policemen who had attempted to spare themselves the fate of their fallen colleague.

In this objective they'd been none too successful. For one thing, by throwing their guns aside when ordered to do so, they had lost precious seconds in scooping them up again. For another, they had no cover.

Two men were instantly cut down, though only one sustained fatal injuries. The other, his thigh covered with blood, groped for his weapon and returned the fire. Unfortunately, one of the panicking guests—a portly man with a briefcase—got in the way. When his massive stomach burst open with a strange sucking sound, he dropped his briefcase and gazed with astonishment at the injury. As he clutched his gut, trying to prevent his intestines from falling out, he kept shaking his head dazedly as though this was a dream from which he might eventually awaken.

The third officer managed to escape the initial fusillade; perhaps because he was the youngest—a rookie with only half a year on the force—he possessed the greatest agility and he'd thrown himself to the floor before the rounds were impacted in the wall beyond him. But he found himself in the frustrating position of having to hold his fire. What sense did it make to begin shooting when the enemy could not be seen and the only ones who could possibly be hurt would be innocent people?

Naturally, there was pandemonium. Those who weren't screaming

were shouting, though what message they were trying to communicate wasn't at all clear with all the commotion. Several men, who looked like sales representatives of some massive conglomerate, were attempting to pile their way into an elevator. One of the robbers —the edgy one who'd been the first to pull the trigger—didn't like the idea that they should escape so easily. It was more a matter of hurt pride than a strategically vital move, but nonetheless, he turned his gun on them, and fired several times into the heaving mass of black jackets.

How many were hit wasn't immediately discernible. But there could be no question that the conglomerate would be recruiting new sales representatives in the very near future. At least two men were critically injured and both of them toppled into the elevator as it was about to close, their bodies sprawled out at awkward angles. With them in the way the doors were unable to shut.

Others, in their desperation to get out of the path of the bullets, found themselves stumbling, and all that did was add to the confusion and further impede flight.

A great number, not so emboldened as these sales representatives—nor so intoxicated with alcohol—decided not to go anywhere but remained flattened out on the floor of the lobby, hoping that they would simply be ignored.

The three men who'd been responsible for this mayhem knew that they could not stay like this forever and so they rounded up half a dozen hostages, four women, one six-year-old boy and one man, and began to make their way, slowly, very slowly, out of the lobby.

Neither of the two surviving officers could get off a shot, not with the hostages forming a human wall around the three gunmen.

As soon as they reached the exit, they discovered what looked like an entire army; snipers were deployed everywhere, behind parked cars, on adjacent rooftops, but they had no clearance to fire.

Observing these events was the news crew from KCVO-TV. In spite of her apprehensions, Ellie had been the first newsperson on the scene and she had fully exploited her advantage, positioning herself and her cameramen directly in front of the hotel. And because there was so much chaos no one in authority had ordered her back. If I don't get a Pulitzer one of these days, she was thinking, it won't be because I haven't had the right story.

To one of the police sergeants standing nearby she said, "Excuse me, are you acquainted with a homicide detective by the name of Callahan?"

"Dirty Harry, you mean?"

"Dirty?"

"That's what everyone calls him. He's right over there."

The sergeant indicated a tall confident man whose face, however, looked to her like a battle had taken place on it. His eyes were bloodshot, he had two days growth of beard, but beyond that there was a sense that he had lived too long and done too much, and all within the last twenty-four hours. He was handsome in a way, but not in a way that Ellie was attracted to. Why was Bressler so eager to have her accompany *him* on his rounds? Well, perhaps she would find out soon enough.

The sergeant said, "You want to know how he came to be called Dirty, you watch."

Harry had just emerged from his unmarked car. It was a two-door Coronado and it was almost as battered as its driver. With seeming indifference, he regarded the strange procession of gunmen and hostages as it eased its way through the crowd onto the sidewalk.

"We need a car and a driver!" one of the robbers declared. "Only one car, no one following us. When we are safely outside the city we will let the hostages go."

It was assumed that this would be the sort of strategy the perpetrators would employ and the police had already contrived a response, which was not to say that there wasn't going to be any improvisation along the way.

Harry stepped forward. "You got yourself a driver," and turning his head resignedly to where the Coronado was parked, he added, "and you've got yourself a car."

"Who are you?" the robber demanded.

"Harry Callahan."

The name seemed to make no difference to him.

The hostages were pushed forward. Of the six, the child seemed the least frightened, bewildered yes, but hardly as tearful or as anxious as his elders.

Just as they came within a few yards of the car—the three robbers squeezed into the middle, the hostages on the outside—Ellie Winston instructed her associates to turn their video cameras on them and to ignite their high powered klieg lights.

The harsh glare of the lights took the approaching hostages and their captors totally by surprise. For a few uncertain moments, they were paralyzed, unable to make out where they were going; hands

flew up to protect the eyes, heads turned away . . .

No one had anticipated this, not even Harry who liked to think that he was prepared for any eventuality. But that did not mean he failed to capitalize on the situation. This was where the improvising came in.

Lifting his .44 Magnum out from the holster strapped underneath his jacket, he raised it with one hand while simultaneously shielding his eyes with the other. The intense lights burned into his retinas. His target was practically a blur. Nonetheless, for his purposes, a blur would just have to do.

Of the three masked figures, one was particularly exposed. There was a young woman to one side of him and an elderly woman to the other, but his head was almost completely visible between the two.

The blast was loud and decisive. The black mask turned bright red and then disappeared from sight altogether as the robber tumbled back, falling against one of his comrades who lost his balance in turn.

Naturally, the gunshot had the effect of sowing confusion and panic among the hostages who started running in all directions.

This left the two remaining gunmen in the open which was just what Harry had intended. Before the second could adequately regain his balance and determine where the shot had come from, Harry had shot him too, the round catching him between his shoulder blades and pitching him back against the sidewalk.

The lone survivor happened to be carrying the laundry bag and even under such obviously urgent circumstances, he could not bring himself to abandon it. Instead, he began to race away, hoping that as soon as he reached the crowd of curiosity seekers, of whom there were more and more all the time, no one would dare fire for fear of taking an innocent life. How he would get away with his ill-gotten gains was another matter entirely.

Harry saw that it was senseless to pursue him—the gunman had too much of a start on him—and he recognized how dangerous it would be to try to bring him down. He was getting too close to the police barricades where the onlookers had assembled, and because there were so many of them, they couldn't flee from the gunman even if they wanted to; they'd all crush each other. So they contented themselves with screaming and grappling futilely with their neighbors in an effort to wrest a path free.

Since Harry could not fire at the man himself, but rather at a more conspicuous, and less risky, target—the laundry bag bulging with jangling jewelry and less noisy wallets—he aimed right for the middle of it. It wasn't hard to hit. The round drove through the bag,

puncturing a gaping hole out of which spewed bills, gold necklaces, diamond rings, and emerald chokers.

The .44 round did not strike the fleeing man himself; there was simply too much bulk for it to go through, but it did cause some of the jewels to explode back like shrapnel. The robber staggered for a few paces as the momentum kept him going and then he collapsed under the weight of the bag.

The police had to fight their way through the crowd to get to him. No longer fearful of being hit by stray bullets, people were eager to get hold of any loose valuables and cash before they could be retrieved by authorities and restored to their rightful owners.

When the leaking bag was hoisted off the prostrate robber, a portion of his dinner jacket and shirt came with it, stuck to the canvas by blood. His entire back was shredded. He might be the first person Harry was aware of ever to be killed by women's jewelry.

With the boldness and ingenuity that had characterized her earlier actions, Ellie was somehow able to penetrate the mob of policemen, onlookers, and souvenir hunters to film additional footage of the dramatic events that would be edited, encapsulated, and commented upon for that evening's local news broadcast.

But while she coolly maintained command of her crew, she was careful not to let Harry out of her sight.

Harry at the moment was being reprimanded by Bressler.

"You weren't given the signal to fire, Harry," he was saying, doing his utmost to keep his temper under control. "There was an agreed-upon signal and it was never given. Why the hell did you open fire?"

"The opportunity was there," he replied simply.

"That's not the goddamn point! You endangered innocent life. What would have happened if you'd missed and that child had gotten hurt?"

"But I didn't miss," Harry pointed out, too tired to argue.

Bressler kept shouting, threatening him with suspension, though Harry had the feeling this was only his way of letting off steam. What with terrorists running rampant and policemen being shot on highways at night and gun-men shooting up the lobby of the Mark Hopkins, he couldn't afford to lose any more men, no matter what the provocation.

In any case, Harry could hardly hear him what with the ambulances screaming up Van Ness.

At last, Bressler had calmed down enough to solicit Harry's opinion

as to who the dead men were.

"Dinner jackets," Harry noted. "I'd guess the *gentlemen bandits.* Or their clones."

"You don't think it might be our terrorist friends? It would be helpful if we could tie this thing up."

"Life doesn't work out that way, I've found."

Bressler regarded Harry carefully. "No, I suppose you're right."

At that instant he looked to his left where several detectives and ambulance attendants were clustered, working out the disposal of the bodies and the stolen goods. They were thrown into relief by the lights of several camera crews, for by now all the other independent stations and network affiliates had managed to get representatives to the scene. They weren't especially pleased to discover that once again Ellie Winston had gotten there before them.

"That reminds me," Bressler said, "There's somebody I want you to meet."

"Oh, and just who might that be?"

"You wait here, Harry . . ."

"I've got to get back to the office and write up this report before it all just slips out of my memory . . ."

"Stay there, that's an order."

Within moments he'd returned with a woman Harry dimly recalled seeing somewhere. But he could not think of where exactly.

"Harry Callahan, I want you to meet Ellie Winston," Bressler said, "Anchorwoman at KCVO."

That was where, Harry thought.

Ellie Winston was very pretty, but her face expressed deep skepticism. She smiled warily and took Harry's hand as Bressler completed the introductions.

"Ellie Winston will be covering you."

Harry gave Bressler a corrosive look but Bressler knew enough to avert his eyes.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

Ellie then broke in to explain that she would do nothing to disrupt his routine. "I will be as discreet as possible, you will hardly know I'm there." Then, sensing that she might wind up in the middle of a heated clash between Bressler and Harry, she quickly disengaged herself, claiming the press of deadlines as an excuse.

Harry very much doubted that Ellie Winston was the sort of woman who could be easily ignored. When he turned to Bressler for full clarification—and it was obvious it was nothing good—he obtained no response at all.

"I'm sure you'll know how to handle her," he said, "you've always had a way with the ladies."

And then he was gone, speedily losing himself in the crowd which was still growing as news spread through the city of the violence that had struck at the Mark Hopkins Hotel on this warm summer's evening.

CHAPTER

Three

Ellie Winston had no sooner returned to her office than she received a phone call—and because it was direct, on her personal line, and not transferred through the switchboard—she assumed it would have to be a friend, most likely David Whittier, an architect with an extraordinary reputation who happened also to be her lover, when either of them had the time to spare. Given the nature of their respective professions, that wasn't very often these days.

But it was not David or anyone else she was acquainted with.

It was a woman but the voice was unfamiliar and, as was the case with the anonymous male caller that afternoon, the voice was vaguely accented, maybe Hispanic.

She identified herself as a representative of the People's Struggle for a Free Puerto Rico and said that her group, which Ellie had not heard of before, claimed responsibility for the attack on the Mark Hopkins an hour before.

Although Ellie was not accustomed to receiving two such phone calls in a single day from terrorists, she was thoroughly professional. She reacted with neither shock nor uncertainty. Her main interest was in establishing the caller's credibility.

Too often in the aftermath of violent episodes, cranks would assert that it was their organization that was the cause of it. Instant publicity at the cost of a dime.

But the woman anticipated Ellie's reaction. "You will learn shortly from the police that the weapons employed in the raid were two M61 Skorpions and a Makarov. The Skorpions are of a Czech manufacture, the Makarov is Soviet." She then proceeded to rattle off the serial numbers of each "so that there will be no doubt in your mind."

From what Ellie had so far learned, the police had only had time to take the handguns used by the robbers into their possession. No department spokesperson she'd talked to had known of their make. That the woman was aware of information the police hadn't obtained yet certainly underscored her credibility.

But what connection did the three *gentlemen bandits* have with a Puerto Rican liberation group? None of them, from all appearances,

looked like they came from Puerto Rico; on the contrary, they gave the impression of being from solid Caucasian American stock.

The woman refused to address this matter. All she would say was, “There are many who act in support of our cause. We have friends everywhere who are able and willing to help the revolution. If we failed this evening to convince the people of this country that we are serious, then we will have no choice but to strike again, and with a far more powerful blow against the colonial American government.”

“Have you contacted anyone else in the media?”

“Not yet, but we will soon.”

“May I ask you why you’ve chosen to call me first and where you got my private number from?”

“I will not answer your second question except to say that we know a great deal about you. Where you go and who you see. But I will answer your first. You are widely known in the Bay area and you are considered the person to reach.”

Ellie didn’t know whether to be flattered or terrified.

“And that’s it?”

“You have the highest ratings of all news broadcasters, Miss Winston, that is enough.”

With that she terminated the conversation.

Ellie resolved to have her number changed, at home as well. But she had the feeling that it wouldn’t matter. She, who was always investigating and watching others, was now being investigated and watched too, but by whom?

She remembered the woman’s words: “We have friends everywhere who are able and willing to help the revolution.” Were there such friends even here at KCVO? Perhaps sitting only a few cubicles away in the newsroom?

“Miss Winston?”

She started and looked up to find herself staring into a pair of angry eyes. The eyes belonged to Harry Callahan.

She wondered how he’d gotten past the security guard downstairs, but supposed it couldn’t have been too difficult. If terrorists could acquire her personal phone number why shouldn’t cops be able to come into the newsroom without being admitted first?

By the look of him she had an idea of what was coming.

“Please, sit down. Can I get you some coffee?”

Anything to calm him down, she thought. She would not ever want

to be this man's enemy.

"No coffee," he muttered. "Too much coffee already."

He did appear to be a man fighting off sleep and beginning to lose.

"Tell me what can I do for you?"

She didn't like the tone in her voice, sounded too officious, too formal. The man made her uneasy, that was part of it. But she was determined to brazen it out with him even though in the back of her mind she was thinking: Maybe I should get out of this.

"I am sure you are a good journalist, but you'd be doing me a great favor if you would find some other detective to follow around. I've got enough on my mind already."

"I am sure you have. But your superior chose you and he must have had his reasons. In any case, I doubt whether he would assign anyone else to me. You are my one opportunity."

"I don't give a shit about your opportunities." His voice was rising. "Do you know anything about me, Miss Winston?"

"Ellie. And no, except that you're a homicide detective."

"Ellie." He pronounced her name quickly, a bit derisively. "Listen to me. I am very bad luck. My partners have had a way of dying or getting seriously wounded. Isn't my fault, isn't theirs. It's just a lot of very bad luck. I function well on my own, always have, and that is how I prefer it. Nothing against you."

"Inspector Callahan . . ." She waited for him to tell her she could call him Harry but that didn't happen. "I won't get in your way if that's what's troubling you. I have no wish to be shot at or prove myself a hero so don't worry yourself on my account. If anything happens to me neither you nor the San Francisco Police Department need take any responsibility. The station handles my insurance."

Harry was becoming exasperated. He didn't know how he could break through to this woman without threatening her and he had no wish to do that. "Look, it's not like you can decide whether you want to get shot at or not. It doesn't happen that way. The fact of the matter is you are going to hamper my investigation and put me in a very bad humor."

"You already seem to be in one. I doubt I could make you worse. Inspector Callahan, do you have any choice in the matter."

"I wish I could say yes."

"But you don't. You have your obligation, I have mine. Let's see if we can't get along then. It might make things easier for both of us."

"Shit." He rose to leave.

“I may not be such a burden as all that. Listen.” She pressed the rewind button of the recorder on her desk, then proceeded to play back the conversation she had just had with the representative of the People’s Struggle for a Free Puerto Rico.

When it was finished she asked Harry if he’d heard of the group before. He hadn’t. She asked him if he’d been aware of the provenance of the guns. He hadn’t.

She then brought out the cassette made that afternoon from the man purporting to be a member of the so-called Alpha Group and played that for Harry as well.

When that was over she asked him if he had heard of this group before. He hadn’t. She asked him if he’d known of anyone else in the police department or in the media receiving a similar call. Again he hadn’t.

“Since these crazies seem to have a strange attraction for me and also seem to be interested in keeping track of me, it may be that I could actually help your investigation, not hamper it.”

Harry didn’t say anything.

She went on, “I mean, as the lady said, I do have high ratings.”

Harry asked if he could use the phone. In less than a minute, he was put through to the forensics lab. “Have you got a make on those guns used in the Mark Hopkins holdup yet?” He was looking at Ellie as he spoke. Several moments passed before he had his answer.

“One Makarov, two M61 Skorpions,” he said to her, confirming the woman’s information. He gazed down at the tape. “Your friend seems to be the genuine article.”

Then he turned and started for the exit.

“What time do you start work tomorrow?” Ellie called after him.

He didn’t give her the satisfaction of a reply until he reached the door. Then he regarded her and said, “Noon.”

“Where do I find you?”

With Harry you had to work for every inch you got.

“Room 750, Justice Building.”

“See you then.”

He said nothing more. But that in itself was a concession. Ellie smiled to herself. Well, she had won a victory of sorts. She only hoped that it would be worth it.

As it happened, Harry did not begin work at noon but rather at eight-

thirty in the morning, which was not the sort of hour he wanted to begin anything. But there was no getting around it. The wave of terrorist activities in the last twenty-four hours amounted to an emergency situation and a hastily called conference was deemed advisable to discuss measures that might be adopted to combat the growing threat.

Harry expected something big. And to be sure there were several men who to all intents and purposes ran the Justice Department, including the Commissioner who had arrived back from Washington on a Red Eye Special before dawn. He barely looked conscious. The D.A. was there, squashing cigarettes into an ashtray every few minutes. He got through half of one, then put it out in favor of another.

There were others who were vaguely familiar to Harry, the sort of men who are always quoted and getting their picture in the paper but never seem to actually accomplish anything in particular.

An FBI agent, introduced to Harry as Tim Connelly, was there, and he did not appear nervous at all. Maybe because his job was not on the fine. Then too there was another guest, Jake Brady, and he was particularly interesting because of the agency he represented. “I am with the CIA,” he had said, a terse but fascinating introduction and a terrific one to liven up dull cocktail party conversations.

It was the Commissioner who took the floor first. The only problem was that he had very little to say since he had been out of town while all hell was breaking loose in his district. After rambling for several minutes, he deferred to Connelly.

Said Connelly, “We’re dealing with a potentially grave situation here.”

To Harry this sounded like understatement. Why *potentially*? He wondered again about the competency of the FBI.

Connelly continued to say that he doubted that the men who held up the Mark Hopkins were tied to any terrorist organization. He did not credit the phone calls claiming otherwise with much veracity. How information about the weapons leaked out was another matter but in Connelly’s estimation there had to be a reasonable explanation. But the Alpha Group seemed to be very real. All they could hope for was that its promised manifesto would give the authorities some clues as to what it represented. This was when he offered the floor to Brady.

Brady was a tall, angular man going bald. He had the look of a ghost about him and there was a certain evil in his eyes as though he had conducted one clandestine operation too many and had lived to regret it.

“Gentlemen,” he began, clearing his throat more like an after dinner speaker who is about to inflict a clichéd anecdote upon his bored audience, “Although the identity, and the motives, of this Alpha Group are as yet unknown, this administration is convinced that it is a manifestation of a vast terrorist network, sponsored by the Soviet Union and its surrogate in the Western Hemisphere, by which I mean Cuba, to create discord and chaos. Moreover, we have reason to believe, based on reliable intelligence sources, that Libya and perhaps other Arab states are involved in fostering this network and in bankrolling it with petro dollars. Accordingly, with the cooperation of my colleague here, Mr. Connelly, it is my pleasure to announce that the Federal government is going to actively participate in bringing to justice all those who threaten our security and well-being.”

He gazed out at those assembled about the green felt conference table with no more interest than he would have had had he been observing an amateur baseball game in Golden Gate Park.

“As you know,” he said with a certain weariness in his voice, “the Central Intelligence Agency is not permitted to engage in covert operations within the borders of the country and for that reason my role will be limited to transmitting intelligence to you on a need-to-know basis. Mr. Connelly here will be in charge of the day-to-day logistics.”

“Does that mean that to all intents and purposes you’re running the show?”

Brady looked across the table at Harry.

“So that we can get to know one another,” Brady said with false cheerfulness, “would you please introduce yourself before asking questions.”

“That’s Callahan, Harry Callahan,” Bressler said resignedly.

“Well, Mr. Callahan, to answer your question, you might put it that way. The relevant Federal agencies that are involved in this do have the final authority, but we mean to cooperate in the fullest with the City of San Francisco and with its law enforcement agencies. I do not expect that there will be any tension. On the contrary, we are approaching this investigation as equal partners who seek the same goals.”

Bullshit was the one word that sprang to Harry’s mind.

“Next question?”

He did not expect to receive the next question from Harry; that much was obvious from the suspicious look that crossed Brady’s face.

“Specifically, how do you propose to do this equal partners number

without everyone tripping over each other's feet and endangering the legal rights of suspects, so we don't end up blowing the case in court?"

"That was just what I was going to ask," said the D.A., adding, "in slightly different terms."

Brady seemed to regard these potential problems as relatively trivial and his tone was clearly patronizing as he answered, "Gentlemen, your interest and ours coincide in this matter. We intend to do nothing that will jeopardize either the course of the investigation or obtaining the appropriate convictions. Let us worry about the logistics, all right?"

There were other questions, but Brady deftly handled all of them, mostly by failing to respond to them directly. As befit somebody who had spent much of his life pursuing a clandestine trade, he was at his best when he was evasive.

At the conclusion of his address, the Commissioner again rose to advise everyone to wait behind. "We have drawn up a protocal for you, a division of labor I'd guess you'd call it. We are assembling task forces to concentrate on different aspects of this case. We plan a several-pronged attack here that will be coordinated on state, local, and Federal levels."

Harry was bemused. What aspects of the case? Until further analyses could be completed by the forensics people, they had no leads to go on—not for who shot the two patrolmen or blew up the international terminal or attacked the Mark Hopkins. The bodies of the *gentlemen bandits* had yet to be identified. As individuals who were so given to heisting other people's wallets it was ironic that they had carried none of their own.

Harry had an idea what all this would come to: a great many officials, flashing ID's and breaking down doors with an abundance of firepower and a paucity of warrants, causing one hell of a commotion while the terrorists went on detonating explosives in public places and blowing holes in people.

But for now there was no sense in protesting. The time might come when the Feds would go home and they could then work on actually solving the case.

"Mr. Callahan?"

Harry turned in his chair to see Brady standing beside him. "I'd like to speak to you a minute if I may."

Harry shrugged. Didn't make any difference to him.

"I am told you are an excellent detective, tough, shrewd, and not always disposed to complying with regulations. I was surprised when

you brought up the issue of legal technicalities. You don't have a reputation for worrying about them."

"That's true, but I have been made acutely aware of them."

"Yes, I see your point. Well, no matter, for our purposes I think you will do just fine. I want you to go to Los Angeles for us."

"Los Angeles? Any particular reason?"

"Naturally. There's a man we want you to stay on top of. He's coming into the country tonight. We believe he may be tied into a major terrorist network here."

"Just how is he tied in?"

"Money. He acts as a conduit for funds emanating from Libya, Yemen, and Cuba. He is quite wealthy in his own right. His name is Gamal Abd'el Kayyim and ostensibly he represents the government in Tripoli. He is here in an official capacity to present a check for five million dollars to the state college system for the establishment of a chair of Arab-American Studies. That's officially. Unofficially, we believe he is here to pass millions more to the terrorists operating in this area."

"And how am I to stay on top of him as you put it?"

"Naturally, he expects that the host government will look after his security, particularly in light of his beneficence to our institutions of higher education. I presume that he has security of his own, but it probably will consist of only a couple of bodyguards. We will supplement those bodyguards with some of our people."

"You want me to pretend to be looking after him as a cover."

"Exactly. We will provide you with all the proper credentials."

"Have you any plan in mind if I discover that he is definitely linked to terrorists in this country?"

"Until we know exactly what the situation is, it's premature to discuss any sort of plan at this stage."

"That's just what I thought," said Harry.

At noon on the dot, she was in his office waiting for him.

"How are you today, Miss Winston?" Harry marveled at how attractive she looked. As far as he knew, journalists often got as little sleep as police officers, but if Ellie contended with long hours it did not reflect in her appearance.

"Ellie, please, and I'm fine."

"You seem to have made yourself at home."

She was sitting on the other side of his desk and he guessed that when he entered she'd been trying to read his papers upside down. The woman couldn't stop nosing about other people's business to save her life.

"I try hard."

"I am afraid I have some bad news for you."

"Oh? You don't sound unhappy."

"Bad news for you I said, not me. I have to go away on a special assignment. I can't tell you how long I'll be gone."

"That's all right."

"All right?" Was she caving in so easily after last night?

"I'll go with you. I should have no problem turning my news show over to someone else for the duration."

"I don't think you understand. I am going undercover. I am about to stop being Harry Callahan, San Francisco cop, for a while. So it wouldn't do either of us any good for you to be tailing me around."

Her face darkened. This would be a difficult one to win.

"But I have the authorization from your superior . . . Lieutenant Bressler . . ."

He didn't allow her to finish. "It's been taken out of his hands. It's gone far beyond Bressler now."

Though Ellie had suffered a setback, she did not view it as an outright defeat. On the contrary, her resolve was heightened. Yesterday she would have walked away from this assignment, not now; she had too much invested in it. She decided then and there that she would simply have to find out what he was up to and track him down herself.

Six hours later, right on schedule, Gamal Abd'el Kayyim disembarked from the AirFrance Concorde that had conveyed him from Paris, and, accompanied by a pair of strapping mustached gentlemen in olive paramilitary jackets, entered U.S. Customs.

So that there would be no repetition of the bombing that had occurred in San Francisco, the international terminal building had been cleared two hours in advance of Kayyim's landing and scrupulously gone over by investigators and bomb squad teams of the LAPD. The entire area, even after it was pronounced free of any explosives or concealed weapons, remained sealed off. By the time Kayyim actually arrived, the terminal building was teeming with police, Federal agents, and airport security. Everyone armed to the

teeth, everyone striking intimidating poses, their eyes inevitably hidden behind tinted glasses and polarized lenses. No one smiled. Except for Kayyim. He smiled broadly as though this public display for his well-being was vastly amusing.

Like his bodyguards, he wore an olive uniform which, however, bore no insignia of rank. Until Qaddafi had ousted King Idris several years ago, he had been a junior officer. With Qaddali's ascent, he had advanced to a ministerial position that was vaguely related to foreign affairs. It was believed that he had a great deal to do with ordering the assassinations of dissident Libyan students in Paris, London and elsewhere, but this could not be proven.

The customs authorities were methodical in inspecting the luggage he and his bodyguards had brought with them, but not fanatic. The man had five million dollars in his pocket that he was going to give to a state university and whatever his politics and alleged involvement in murders in far off capitals, that five million dollars evidently entitled him to a certain amount of deference.

Only after he had been passed through customs were newsmen allowed to obtain a glimpse of him. And then only through a glass barrier. Cameras flashed. Abd'el Kayyim smiled more broadly and waved.

He scarcely looked like a sinister assassin. Quite the opposite, television viewers would be reminded of a popular movie actor, for he was extraordinarily handsome, with magnetic black eyes and a radiant expression. Here was a man who a dinner party host wouldn't mind inviting as his guest of honor.

Trailing in his wake as he proceeded in the direction of his waiting limousine were his bodyguards, supplemented by the police and the security men, all of them looking so glum that they might very well have been marching off to a funeral—perhaps their own.

Among them was Harry Callahan, who for the duration of Kayyim's stay in this country was to be identified as Dan Turner, one of several detectives recruited from a private agency to insure that no harm came to this important and affluent visitor.

That evening Kayyim threw a party in his suite on the fourth floor of the Beverly Wilshire. This was not a party, however, that people had fought to wrangle invitations for. Many of those present, mainly from academic and political circles, would rather have been elsewhere but in this case, with five million dollars in the offing, obligation took precedence. It was not the lack of food for the food was abundant, nor was the problem with the quality because it was of the highest and had been provided by one of the county's major caterers. Nor was it

the guest list, for the suite was filled with brilliant conversationalists. No, the problem was that Kayyim had chosen to obey the Koranic injunction against the imbibing of alcohol. There was nothing more stimulating to be had than artificial champagne and fruit juices. This put a damper on the party and the guests, after stuffing themselves on hors d'oeuvres and roast beef, soon found excuses to leave.

But if Kayyim was disappointed by their early flight he gave no sign of it. He signaled all those save his bodyguards to leave the suite promptly at ten o'clock, informing them that they would no longer be required that night. He would see them all in the morning before he was to leave for the campus in Westwood.

"I will be perfectly safe," he assured them, ignoring their protests. "My men are efficient and most able to defend me without additional reinforcements."

Harry was the only outsider who remained behind. While he had to leave the suite itself, he did not go far. He had the impression that Kayyim had made other plans this particular night and he intended to find out just what they were.

What he expected was that there would be late night visitors to see Kayyim, but this did not turn out to be the case. Kayyim decided to go out with his bodyguards. No longer in military dress, they wore sports jackets and open shirts, obviously unwilling to attract attention.

Harry was prepared for them as they readied to leave. As soon as he'd left the suite he went directly to the room rented for his benefit by the CIA—naturally under an assumed name that would never be linked with the intelligence agency. There he could listen to every word, fed by taps through an ingenious circuitry into a specially designed monitor. Of course, merely hearing every word they were saying did him no good at all since they spoke in Arabic.

That had been taken into account—the CIA was not as inept as all that—and a young, very intense man of about thirty was seated by the monitor, transcribing the bugged conversations for the sole purpose of interpreting them.

Possibly Kayyim and company sensed they were being bugged, even if they didn't realize that those doing the bugging were nearby. According to the interpreter, they had said nothing of any interest since the conclusion of the party.

When they got out into the hallway, Harry, opening his door just a fraction of an inch, overheard Kayyim giving instructions to his men, interrupting the flow of Arabic to say, "From hereon in, we speak nothing but English. No matter what happens, nothing but English."

Then the elevator arrived and they stepped into it. Harry raced out the fire exit and down the stairs, reaching the lobby only moments after Kayyim's party had marched out.

He'd ordered a car brought around for himself; it was idling directly behind a Seville. The three Libyans evidently meant to use the Seville rather than the limousine, again so as not to invite too much attention despite the fact that a limousine in a town like L.A. was not a rare sight.

As far as Harry could make out, no one in the Seville was aware that he was tailing them. But on the other hand, he wasn't aware that he was being tailed also.

CHAPTER

Four

"When do you plan on getting out of there, Ellie? Don't you ever stop? Have you any idea what time it is?"

The fact was that Ellie did not. The newsroom was nearly empty so she supposed it was late, "David, I'll be there. There are just a few things need finishing up."

"Well, hurry. I'm beginning to feel like you're in New York for all the chance I get to see you."

One of the things that Ellie was finishing up was an analysis of the so-called manifesto the Alpha Group had delivered to the station that afternoon. It was pure gibberish, as far as she could make out, with countless references to colonialism and exploitation of oppressed peoples, but the tortured grammar and execrable spelling robbed the mimeographed document of whatever coherence it might have once possessed. Most significantly, the authors never made it clear exactly what it was they wanted in order for them to cease their terrorist acts. Ellie guessed that in all probability, they didn't want their demands met because they were too enamored of violence.

At one point she was distracted by the T.V. monitors that were mounted around the perimeter of the newsroom. The eleven o'clock news was on, broadcast from elsewhere in the building; the footage being shown seemed to have been shot in an airport.

Ellie gathered that it was the Los Angeles airport. Some dignitary was advancing across the screen, waving cheerfully and displaying a smile filled with glowing white teeth. Right behind him, Ellie saw a succession of men who were all obviously intent upon getting in the line of fire should anyone attempt to assassinate this dignitary. Suddenly, Ellie spotted a man she was sure was Harry Callahan.

It was difficult to tell; he was a shadowy figure racing quickly across the screen, his head half-turned from the camera. But he had the right build, and from the little she could see, the right face, and certainly the right dour expression.

She took the elevator down to the fifth floor to where the broadcast was originating and prevailed upon one of the technicians to run the tape back again. This time she froze the image and stared at it for

several moments. There was no longer any doubt in her mind. It was definitely Callahan. So that was his cover.

"Who is that man?" she asked the technician, pointing to the waving dignitary.

The technician told her. "He's some kind of Libyan official."

"Libyan," she repeated. It was well-known that for years the Libyans had been aiding terrorists around the globe: the Basques, the PLO, the IRA, the Baader-Meinhof Gang, the Red Brigade . . . She began to see the connection.

With no hesitation whatsoever, she booked herself a late night New West shuttle to L.A. She had the distinct impression that her story was moving south and when her story moved she moved with it. Tomorrow, from L.A., she would inform her boss and explain her action. She was convinced that he would pose no objection though he might balk a bit when she presented him with her expense account.

Tonight the only person she had to explain anything to was David.

He was not, as she'd surmised, very happy about her decision. But wisely, he saw no point in arguing. Instead, he pleaded with her to let him know where she was staying just as soon as she secured a hotel room for herself.

"I worry about you," he said. "And I love you very much."

"I love you," she said, automatically, so that he didn't quite believe her as much as she wanted him to.

On the New West flight, she was too tired to read the materials she had brought with her for background use. Her eyes glazed over and she would have fallen asleep if the two-engine jet hadn't begun its descent only twenty minutes or so after getting up into the air. There was only a scattering of people on this midnight shuttle. And in spite of her celebrity in San Francisco, Ellie was relieved to find that no one recognized her.

As it turned out, however, she was mistaken. Somebody did recognize her. He was a man who was sitting one row behind and across the aisle from her. In his sedentary posture, one wouldn't have known that he measured only five feet which was why to his associates—for he had no friends—he was known as the Small Man.

After a while, Harry no longer had any notion where he was going, or more specifically, where Kayyim and his faithful pair were going for their direction was one and the same. Harry, to be sure, didn't know

Los Angeles all that well, but he doubted whether most Angelinos—most white, well-to-do Angelinos at any rate—ever strayed this far from home. The four-lane highways turned to two-lanes and then into streets where in the little light that was available, sad crumbling two-story houses could be discerned.

Then, all at once, the neighborhood changed and Harry found he was in what looked like a commercial district, ablaze with flickering neon lights and signs signaling the locations of transient hotels, bars, laundromats, taco joints, and check cashing establishments. A disproportionate number of these signs were in Spanish. The streets here were crowded with people who seemed to have no perceptible purpose as they moved, many of them shouldering huge radios blasting music that was sometimes Mexican, sometimes a loud convulsive rock.

The Seville began to slow down and finally came to a stop, double-parking in front of a derelict-looking building with a sign in garish pink letters indicating that it was the Avila Hotel.

Harry parked not far away and watched as Kayyim and one of his confederates emerged from the Seville and entered the hotel. Several windows were open, Harry noticed, other windows weren't open so much as they were blank. The glass had long ago been knocked out of them.

Leaving his own car, Harry circled around and followed them into the hotel. He threw a sidelong glance at the bodyguard waiting in the Seville, but read nothing in the latter's expression from which to take alarm. There was no reason he should have identified Harry.

The lobby smelled rank, the man at the desk was asleep and beside him on the counter rested an empty bottle of tequila.

The stairs were steep and illuminated by a bare sixty watt bulb. Harry could hear the footsteps of the two men before he could see them.

They weren't speaking, not in Arabic, nor in English. Harry, his head lowered, a wide brimmed hat pulled over his face so that it was cast well into shadow, kept an even pace behind them. He did not attempt to muffle his own footsteps, why should he? Other people lived in this hotel, and would be expected to come and go at all hours of the night.

At one point, Kayyim's bodyguard glanced backwards at him, but gave no indication that Harry's presence concerned him. He might as well have been another drunk shambling home after several hours tossing back whiskys in the saloon around the corner.

Then they turned and by the time Harry reached the landing—and he didn't want to risk quickening his pace—they were standing in front of a door that resembled all the other doors along the fourth floor corridor. It too could have done with another coat of paint.

The bodyguard knocked. The door came open, cautiously at first, a man peeked out, then they were permitted to enter.

Harry continued down the hallway till he stood in front of the door. He pressed his ear to it. He heard voices which he could not initially make out. He feared that the conversation might be conducted in Spanish, then recalled that the visitors would be no more likely to know Spanish than their hosts would Arabic. English was what they would probably speak and English it was. Unfortunately, as soon as the words were distinct enough to be understood, Harry was interrupted.

A man in a windbreaker, his mouth invisible behind its upturned collar, was standing opposite Harry, separated by several yards of threadbare carpeting, with what looked like an automatic.

Harry did not know exactly what this man expected, but he wasn't inclined to stay where he was and find out. He threw himself to the floor a fraction of a second before a sizeable hole appeared in the door he'd just been standing in front of. There was more noise from the splintering of wood than from the detonation itself which led Harry to conclude that his assailant was using a silencer. Not that this knowledge would do him much good. He'd be just as dead if he was struck by a bullet that came soundlessly as by one that didn't.

The assailant, perhaps regretting his hesitancy in firing, came running down the hall. At the same time, the occupants of the room—undoubtedly disturbed by the shot that had torn a chunk of wood out of their door—appeared, a half dozen of them bristling with arms.

"*Que es esto*?" someone called out.

There was a response but Harry was not interested in it, being too preoccupied with the business of getting out of the Avila Hotel reasonably intact.

With his attackers thrown into confusion, Harry enjoyed a temporary advantage. He exploited it as much as possible, rushing down a corridor that lay perpendicular to the one he'd just traversed. The only difficulty with this route was that it culminated in a dead end. There was a window there, with a sick pinkish light emanating from it, and nothing else.

Harry kept low, zigzagging in expectation of the fire he would soon draw. And he did all right. The bullets sent a considerable amount of

plaster cascading down around him, covering his head and shoulders, but failing to do him harm. There was no chance to return the fire; by the time he would have gotten his gun out, he would have been dead.

This whole affair was producing an enormous din. The staccato of automatic fire in such confined circumstances was bad enough, but besides that, everyone was shouting and yelling with great fervency. There was no doubt that this racket would awaken even the soundest sleeper. Even in the best of times, voices carried through the walls and down the airshafts in this place.

As Harry approached the window, he realized why there was so much pink light. It was coming from the neon sign that advertised the name of the hotel. He hoped there was something beyond the window to break his fall because there was simply no other alternative than to jump out of it. Fortunately, it was open, letting in the stifling summer night air.

He didn't think, he just hurtled himself through the narrow opening the frame of the window provided. The crackle of gunfire followed him.

Anticipating a free, if rather awkward fall of four floors, Harry was gratified to find that he'd landed on a rusting fire escape. His acrobatics had exacted a price, straining ligaments that weren't designed to be strained and leaving unseemingly bruises on his flesh that were accompanied by a sharp pain.

But he could hardly pause to consider the extent of his injuries. Immediately, he was on his way down the fire escape, leaping from one step to the next, and as before, keeping low so as to give his enemies as small a target as possible. He registered the inquisitive, if slightly accusatory, looks he drew from many of the hotel's residents who were at their windows seeing what all the commotion was about.

There were now gunshots ringing painfully off the railings of the fire escape. The result was a kind of demented symphony—a succession of wild and improbably discordant notes.

The loud metallic clatter of boots above signaled to Harry that he was being pursued, that these lunatics were not going to settle for just firing down on him from any fourth floor window.

The fire escape did not reach the ground, there was a large gap—almost seven feet in height—separating one from the other. It wasn't a jump that would break one's neck, but it would surely break an ankle.

Harry dropped down and discovered he was now in danger of being shot by another party. He realized Kayyim's second bodyguard had been left sitting in the Seville.

He was firing up at the fire escape as Harry was in flight down it. As yet he had achieved nothing from his efforts.

Very quickly he adjusted his aim, taking account of Harry's new position. Harry had only the darkness to protect him. Given the multitude of neon lights and fluorescent signs in the vicinity, that wasn't a whole lot.

Conscious of how exposed he was, he drew in close to the wall of the hotel, and dropped to the ground. Flush against the four stone steps that led to the hotel's entrance, Harry levelled his Magnum at the bodyguard who was a shadowy form in the near-distance.

The footsteps on the fire escape sounded much closer. The terrorists were still shouting unintelligibly and shooting though their bullets were coming nowhere near Harry. It might be that they kept shooting simply because it was a habit with them and made them feel they were actually accomplishing something.

No sooner had he sighted his weapon, than the bodyguard disappeared. Harry couldn't see where the hell he'd gone. All at once, though, Harry heard him cry out in Arabic. That was enough. He turned the Magnum in the direction of the voice and fired, thinking maybe he'd get lucky.

He got lucky.

There was a shriek of immense pain, followed within a second by the sight of a figure pitching backwards and collapsing into a heap on the sidewalk. Somewhere glass shattered with a stray bullet's impact, and the sound resembled, almost exactly, the scream of the stricken bodyguard.

At that moment, several rounds peppered the stone surface of the stairs close to Harry. It was all he needed to change his location. He broke into a run and flattened himself under Kayyim's Seville. Kayyim's Seville would never be the same. While it was composed of bullet-proof glass, the chassis itself was not armored and it began to register the impression of several rounds intended for the man lying sprawled underneath.

Raising his eyes, Harry saw that there were still men on the fire escape, maybe three or four, it was hard to tell. Two others had leapt to the ground. In their arms were some formidable looking weapons, possibly Soviet-made AK47's. In the partial dimness, it was impossible to say for certain.

In the distance, Harry could hear sirens but whether that meant the police were on their way to the Avila or to some other emergency in this barrio—for there probably were emergencies in this area

throughout every long hot summer night—Harry could not say. He could only hope.

Three times he fired on the knot of men perched on the final rungs of the fire escape. One man, hit, catapulted off and came down head first. A second waited and jumped. The third, struck in the shoulder, toppled back but was caught on the railing and hung there. Blood and sinew dripped from the wound while he groaned with extraordinary pain before lapsing into unconsciousness.

The sirens were growing louder and there could no longer be any doubt that the police were approaching. The firing abruptly ceased; the terrorists—those of them still alive—either rushed back into the hotel through the lobby or returned inside by way of the fire escape. In no time they were gone. Behind them they had left three dead men. Probably without I.D.'s.

Not only would Harry have great difficulty in explaining his presence here at the Avila Hotel to his counterparts on the LAPD, but he was risking his cover as well. He decided to disappear like his opponents. There was no problem losing himself in the crowd that was gathering in the street to survey the battleground that was now free of gunfire.

Without attracting any attention, Harry got into his car and negotiated it out into the heavy traffic. He guessed that in much the same manner, Kayyim would conveniently vanish from the scene. With his kind of money, he would not want to suffer the indignity of explaining to the police what *he* was doing at the Avila either.

CHAPTER

Five

It was much too bright, and certainly much too early, when the wake-up call came. Harry shook his head groggily as consciousness returned, and he recalled the events of the previous night at the Avila Hotel. It had been worth the trouble. He had proven, to his own satisfaction at any rate, that Kayyim was definitely linked—perhaps as a paymaster—to terrorists in this country. What kind of terrorists exactly, whether they represented the Alpha Group or a Puerto Rican liberation organization or some other political faction, remained a mystery. All he could say for sure was that they had no hesitation about resorting to arms at even the slightest provocation.

He was vaguely apprehensive when he appeared before Kayyim half an hour after waking. But there was nothing about Kayyim's behavior to indicate he held any suspicions regarding Harry. In all the confusion last night, it was unlikely that anyone had gotten a good look at him or had associated him with the man who guarded the Libyan by day.

However, there was no way for him to ignore the fact that this morning he had only one personal bodyguard. "I am afraid he is indisposed," said Kayyim to account for the missing man.

Connelly, who'd come down from San Francisco to handle Kayyim's visit, assured him that additional men would be provided to make up for his absence.

Turning to Harry, Connelly said, "Stay close to him. I want you up there on the podium with him." He even went so far as to introduce Harry to Kayyim, using his alias.

"Mr. Turner, I am so pleased," Kayyim said, reaching out his hand. There was no hint of insincerity that Harry could detect in his voice.

Because of security considerations, demonstrators protesting Kayyim's donation to the state university system were shuttled aside and kept behind a police barrier. There they paraded with signs denouncing Qaddafi and the rectors who had agreed to the establishment of an Arab-American chair.

In the middle of the campus green, a special stage had been erected the day before. Several hundred folding chairs were set out in front of

it. City and campus policemen were everywhere but the dominant sound was the babble coming out of walkie-talkies.

Way to the rear, there was an area measuring no more than twelve feet across for the press. It was there that Ellie Winston was directed, with a free-lance camera crew hired only a couple of hours previously. Her boss hadn't been particularly happy to hear what she'd done, but on the other hand, he conceded that she might be on to something, and in any case, Kayyim was news, no matter what else happened with Harry Callahan and his ongoing investigation.

At quarter to ten the scrupulously chosen audience, consisting mainly of city officials, trustees, and professors, filed onto the campus. With a minimum of confusion they took their seats and waited. And waited.

Not until the security people had completed one final tour of the area were Kayyim and his hosts permitted to mount the podium.

There were almost as many plainclothesmen on the podium as dignitaries. For this occasion, Kayyim chose to wear traditional dress: a keffiyah over his head and a long white flowing robe. There was no question he had a flair for the theatrical.

Once the dignitaries had all seated themselves, the Provost rose to address the carefully screened audience. His remarks were practically inaudible until a technician adjusted the microphone. Even then, he had some difficulty because of the uproar the demonstrators were making at the other end of the campus.

The idea, as Harry understood it, was to make this quick. Get on and off, so that there would be little opportunity for any embarrassing incident to occur. It was only because Kayyim had insisted on public ceremony as one of the criteria for the gift that this affair had been arranged at all. That Kayyim wanted it outdoors was regarded as an unwarranted intrusion into university business. But five million dollars was five million dollars.

Having said his piece, the Provost gestured to Kayyim. In response, there was a flurry of polite applause.

All this while Harry was scanning the crowd. His eyes were practiced at observing any suspicious movements though to anyone else they might appear perfectly innocent. There is a difference between the man reaching in his jacket for a gun and the man reaching in his jacket for a cigarette lighter, but that difference can often be subtle.

Kayyim had not been speaking for longer than five minutes when Harry noticed a man of about thirty-five sitting six rows from the

podium. He was nondescript, with a face devoid of all expression. He was dressed in a white sportscoat and had the air of a somewhat overworked Ph.D. candidate. He was fidgeting and nervously knitting his fingers together—though it might have been because he was bored wth the proceedings, which was certainly understandable, or it could be because of the hot sun bearing down on him. Nonetheless, Harry began to watch him closely. There was something he didn't like about the man's eyes, the concentrated manner in which he gazed at Kayyim. To Harry, he seemed like a man on the verge of committing an act of great finality, and his squirming was nothing more than a manifestation of his nervousness.

Now Harry listened more attentively to what Kayyim was saying. He was approaching the conclusion of his speech, and if that were the case, either the man would have to make his move or forget about it. That is, if Harry was right in assuming the man actually was preparing to do something dangerous.

Kayyim came to the end of his address for there was another scattering of applause that gradually built in intensity. Kayyim nodded in acknowledgement and turned away from the podium to reclaim his seat.

Harry kept his eyes on the man in the white sports coat. He was not applauding. One hand had slipped under his coat. Harry leaned forward, hoping to get a better look. But a man just in front of his suspect had abruptly risen from his chair, blocking Harry's view.

Then he caught sight of him again. He was fully erect, his arm extended. The sun caught a metal object in his hand and glinted off it. Harry wasted no time. He sprang from his seat and tackled Kayyim, throwing him to the stage, just as there was a muffled pop that was all but drowned out by the collective gasps from members of the audience. They might have thought Harry was the assailant.

It was only due to Harry's action that Kayyim was not struck. But one of the university officials, occupying a position on the podium, was not so fortunate. Having just risen to shake Kayyim's hand, he'd placed himself directly in the path of a .38 shell that entered his chest, half an inch or so below his solar plexus.

A surprised, somewhat dazed, expression came over his face as he lowered his eyes to inspect the wound. There was very little blood at first. It took several moments before the enormity of the damage inflicted on his vitals registered with the man. He rocked back and forth and then slowly sank back into his chair, his hands clasped together on his chest. He turned to speak to the man sitting next to him, to tell him that he had been shot, but there was so much

confusion that there was no one there to listen. “I think I need to lie down,” he mumbled. Those were his last words.

The would-be assassin, realizing that he had missed his target, managed to maneuver his way out to the aisle. Because no one was aware of what was happening, there was no one to stop him. There was a sense that something had gone gravely wrong, however, and dozens of policemen raced toward the stage, brandishing their weapons.

The assailant seemed to understand that there was no point in lingering, that there would not be a second opportunity to kill the Libyan minister. People were thronging into the aisles, and so when he attempted to run, he found his progress impeded. He struggled against the human tide, ignoring the protests of those that he almost knocked over in his frantic attempt to escape.

Naturally, the representatives of the media were falling over themselves in an effort to capture the incident on film. They spontaneously broke out of the confined area to which they’d been limited. It should have surprised no one to find that Ellie Winston was among the first to get to the campus proper with her cameramen.

“Are you getting all this?” she kept asking, fearful that they would succeed only in documenting a panicky crowd and miss the assailant.

But there was no danger of that. They were capturing the man on videotape in sharp focus. And how could they not? He was coming right toward them.

After several seconds had elapsed without any additional shots, Harry realized that Kayyim was safe—for the time being, at any rate—and he picked himself up. Then, before Kayyim could utter a word, he hurled himself off the stage. Rather than try advancing through the crowd, he chose to leap from one abandoned folding chair to the next.

Spotting the man, or more precisely, his white sports coat, Harry increased his speed. At the same time, he freed his gun and when he brought it into view, those people closest to him cowered and started running in the opposite direction.

The assailant—in spite of his desperate circumstances—was apparently not so preoccupied that he didn’t notice the cameras that were recording his every move. Even if he should manage to escape, his face would be known to millions of people around the country come the evening news. He had not taken this into account in his calculations.

It might not be possible to prevent his image from being broadcast,

but he obviously thought that he would do something to exact a price for it. Not having put his .38 away, he had only to aim and fire it now, and in this instance, he showed none of the hesitation that had sabotaged his attempt on Kayyim's life.

Too late the cameraman comprehended his predicament. He was so professional, he continued to shoot the assailant with his video camera at the same instant that the assailant was shooting him.

The bullet smashed into his throat, severed the jugular, releasing as a result, a Niagara of blood. He was dead as he dropped to the ground. His camera fell on top of him, the tape still running.

His colleague, preferring to save his ass rather than win a posthumous Pulitzer for news photography, threw himself down without the slightest regard for the fate of his equipment.

Ellie remained standing, incredulous that one of her cameramen should have died before her eyes. She knew that she should duck or get out of the way or do something but she was rooted to the spot, paralyzed by fear, and there was the assailant looking right at her, his eyes gazing into hers with a strange intensity. He had come to a halt, only yards away, and for a moment it was as if he had all the time in the world. She had the feeling that she knew this man from somewhere, that they had met long before, and that he now intended merely to renew their acquaintance. This was not his intention at all. She did not actually see the .38 until he had it raised in his hand and the sun was on it, making it sparkle as brightly as a fabulous jewel.

CHAPTER

Six

"Drop it!" Harry yelled, loud enough to be heard over the tumult.

The assailant swung about immediately, but the .38 was still grasped in his hand. He possessed fine reflexes, firing as he turned, instinctively gauging Harry's location.

Harry had anticipated this, and shifted his position just sufficiently so he was no longer in the line of fire. Just as he discharged his .44, several police officers and plainclothesmen had the suspect in range and began to open up on him.

The .44 took him first, causing him to collapse with a gaping hole in his thigh. Still, with the .38 in his grip, he struggled to rise but by that time several men were shooting at him and he had no chance to get off another round. His body twitched in midair as he was struck again and again; his white sports coat, torn and shredded, flapped in the breeze like a flag of surrender. Then there seemed to be nothing left of him at all. He seemed to have folded up when he died, his knees close to his brow, like a fetus.

Harry would have liked to have known who this man was, but there were too many detectives congregating over the body. No telling who had the authority here, but one thing was sure, it wasn't Harry. His obligation was to watch out for Kayyim, unless, of course, he was forced to track him instead.

It was at that moment that he looked up and saw Ellie Winston.

She had, more or less, recovered from the shock of nearly being killed. Her cameraman, relieved that he'd been spared the fate of his friend, had gotten himself erect and was once more filming the aftermath of a botched assassination attempt.

She was very pale and for a few seconds, she seemed not to recognize Harry. But Harry knew her all right. And this time he was unable to elude her.

She stepped up to him.

He shrugged and resigned himself to enduring questions from her that he would do his best to deflect.

"We can't go on meeting like this, Miss Winston," he said first.

She managed a faint smile. “I want to thank you.”

“For what?” He honestly wasn’t certain what she was referring to.

“For saving my life.”

It was only now that Harry realized that this was what he had in fact done. He’d been so obsessed with stopping the assailant, whoever he might be, that he hadn’t perceived the threat he’d posed to Ellie.

“In the future, Miss Winston, maybe you’d be better advised to stay in your office. It’s not exactly hospitable once you get outside.”

“If I had wanted to I could have been a housewife and then no one would have to worry,” she replied. “But that was not the choice I made.”

“Suit yourself.” He turned away.

“Are you staying in L.A.?” she asked, accelerating her pace to keep abreast of him.

“That’s none of your concern.” Actually, he didn’t know what he’d be doing now that Kayyim had had his public ceremony and given away his country’s petrol-dollars.

“On the contrary. You’re part of my story. I followed you here, I’ll follow you wherever you go. So you’d better get used to me.”

This astonished him. He’d assumed she’d come to L.A. to cover the Kayyim visit and that his meeting with her was pure coincidence. He groaned.

“Why? You don’t want to have anything to do with me. I told you that before, I’m bad luck. Go home and cover fires or the March of Dimes, whatever it is you people do. Leave me alone.”

She was undeterred. “Look,” she said, “I’ll make a bargain with you.”

He froze in his tracks. He stared at her quizzically. “What kind of a bargain, Miss Winston?”

“You’re undercover now, aren’t you?”

“Until you came along I was,” he conceded.

She gestured towards her cameraman. “I’ve got you on tape. I’m the only one who does, too. I can go back to San Francisco this afternoon and have that tape broadcast tonight with you shooting that man or else I can edit you out.”

“You will identify me by name and say I’m with the San Francisco Police Department?”

She might have been bluffing, but Harry couldn’t afford the risk.

"That's right."

"You'd blow my cover?"

"Like you, I have a job to do. If you make it impossible for me why should I help you out?"

"Maybe because I am trying to prevent people from blowing each other away and all you're trying to do is get some damn prize."

She wasn't convinced. "I don't expect you'll see it my way. I just want you to know the situation, that's all."

"What do I have to do for you to edit me the hell out of the tape?"

"Cooperate with me. Tell me where you're going and what you'll be doing. I want to record it, but I promise you I won't release anything until your investigation's over. I'm not greedy, I just want a little give-and-take."

He sighed. He didn't like this. It was one thing dealing with murderers. Dealing with attractive female T.V. reporters was something else again. He began to suspect that all things being equal he preferred the murderers. They weren't so devious.

"All right, Miss Winston . . ."

"Ellie."

"Ellie, you've got yourself a deal. But the truth of the matter is I don't know what happens next, where I'll be assigned."

She nodded dubiously. "Let me know this afternoon or whenever they let you know. I'll wait for your call. I'm staying at the Wilshire."

"Isn't everybody?" he said.

* * *

By the time he returned to the Beverly Wilshire, Kayyim had already been spirited away in a limousine which could resist handfired rockets if need be. But there were no more assaults on the minister. He acted with great aplomb and throughout the lunch the university gave in his honor at the faculty club, he was as gracious and expansive as ever. Maybe he was accustomed to attempts on his life; in any case he refused to discuss the incident except to express his regrets that two people had died as a consequence of the unprovoked attack.

Connelly was waiting for Harry in the suite. He looked hot and weary and the iced tea he was consuming didn't seem to be doing him much good.

"You did good out there today," he said. "If Kayyim had been hit,

there would have been hell to pay. Very embarrassing for us even if he is a son of a bitch."

"Did you find out who the joker was who tried to blow him away?"

"Name's Mark Morgan. Mean anything to you? Means nothing to us. We checked it out. Washington ran the name through the computers. Nothing. Could be an alias. But when I say nothing, I mean that even the fingerprints don't match up to any prints we have in our files or the armed services have in theirs."

"And how did he get onto the campus with all the security checks?"

"Again, it's a mystery. Did somebody get careless? Was somebody paid off? Your guess is as good as mine. We're trying to find out right now, but you can bet your ass nothing much is going to come of it. But we did come up with some information about the explosion in San Francisco Airport that you might be interested in."

So much had occurred since then that Harry had forgotten about it., "I'm listening."

"Apart from the TNT a very volatile *plastique* was used called RDX, otherwise known as cyclotrimethylene trinitramine. Class A explosive, that is to say it can't be shipped on any passenger or cargo aircraft. Nor can it be exported without a Federal license. It's considered a defense article."

"How . . . ?"

Connelly anticipated his question. "How did our friends in the Alpha Group get hold of it? That's a very interesting question and since there's no record of any RDX being heisted from the plants authorized to make the substance, there are only two conclusions I can draw. One is that the terrorists concocted the stuff themselves, which is pretty unlikely and would require sophisticated technology they probably don't have access to . . ."

"Or?"

"Or they have some very good connections."

It was at that moment that the phone rang. Connelly picked up. He listened for a few moments, mumbled something in response, hung up, and turned back to Harry.

"Kayyim's just gotten back. He's coming upstairs to change and pack. He's on his way out of here."

"High time we were free of the joker."

"Oh, we'll be free of him all right. You won't."

He enjoyed the look of puzzlement that came over Harry's face. "I don't understand."

"I didn't tell you before, but Kayyim is especially grateful to you for saving his life this morning."

"All in the line of duty."

"That may well be, but you see, he is short one bodyguard . . ."

"The bodyguard with the slight indisposition?" Harry attempted, with little success, to keep the sarcasm out of his voice.

Connelly's sardonic smile indicated he knew much more about the bodyguard's indisposition than he was letting on. "That's right. He won't be able to make the return trip and Kayyim needs a replacement, just so long as he's in the air. Maybe fifteen, twenty hours more or less. When he gets where he's going, he'll have plenty of his own men to protect his ass."

"And you're saying I'm to be it."

"Hey, you proved yourself, didn't you? He requested you and considering how advantageous it would be to us, why, we were happy to agree. That's twenty additional hours you'll be close to him. Who knows what you can pick up?"

"A disease," muttered Harry, who had been looking forward to going home.

"Look, you're going in style. Kayyim doesn't stint." He paused, shrugging, "Except in the alcohol department. But maybe you can slip yourself a few on a stopover somewhere."

"One thing you didn't mention. Where am I going, Libya?"

"No, not Libya. Beirut, Lebanon. That's Kayyim's next stop."

"But they're in the middle of a war over there."

Connelly nodded. "So I understand," he said.

It was only after Connelly had left the suite that Harry recalled his promise to Ellie Winston. He had the operator ring her room. Sure enough, she was eagerly awaiting his call. She picked up on the first ring.

"You said you wanted to know where I'm going, Miss Winston?"

"That's right." She did not remind him to call her Ellie.

Harry could hear the anticipation in her voice. "I don't think you're going to like this. Beirut."

"Beirut, Lebanon?"

"You got it."

"But there's a war on over there!"

"Exactly what I said."

"Whatever for?"

"Hey, you know what I know. I kept my promise, now you keep yours and make sure my face isn't on the six o'clock news tonight."

She ignored this. "You're going over with Kayyim, aren't you? That has to be it. You're on the 7:45 Pan Am flight to Paris."

She knew more than he did. Obviously, she had somehow gotten Kayyim's itinerary. But that was not his concern at this point.

"Miss Winston, once again, do I have your assurance that you will do the necessary editing on that film? I haven't much time."

"Yes, Inspector Callahan, your anonymity is guaranteed. Have a pleasant flight."

When Harry put down the phone, he had the feeling that something wasn't quite right. Ellie Winston had been too acquiescent; it wasn't like her. She has to be up to something, he decided, but he wasn't certain he cared to discover precisely what it was.

They had fifteen minutes alone together. As soon as Ellie had alerted him that she was on her way to Beirut, David Whittier dropped everything and grabbed the first shuttle flight available to L.A. They agreed that L.A. Airport was the most convenient place to meet.

Whittier was a handsome man who looked more like one who constructed buildings rather than designed them. Two years divorced, with three teenaged children, he never thought he'd become so involved with Ellie Winston. Their personalities were so different. She was so resolutely independent that it was an ordeal trying to keep up with her; she was always running off somewhere.

But never to Beirut, never to some part of the world where she was so clearly in danger. Whittier had come to L.A. not for the purpose of saying goodbye but to discourage her from making the journey at all.

"You're crazy, you know that, don't you? You'll get yourself killed."

"I will do my best not to," she said evenly, "I have just as much interest in getting home safely as you do."

They were sitting in a restaurant which overlooked one of the airfields. A Lockheed 1011 was in the process of taking off. When Whittier looked up into the sky the jet was a bright silver speck. He thought of Ellie leaving and felt sick.

"You don't know what it's like there," he protested. "I read the other day soldiers burst into the American Hospital and started shooting indiscriminately in the emergency room. There are probably

dozens of political factions murdering each other for just a few square miles."

"Forty-three," Ellie said confidently.

"Forty-three what?"

"Forty-three military factions. I've done my homework."

"You're hopeless." It was growing harder for him to contain his anger. "Don't you love me?"

She took his hand in hers and assured him that of course she did.

"But that's not enough to make you stay, is it?"

"I've got a job to do."

"Somebody else could do your damn job. No one's forcing you to go to Beirut. You're the one who insisted on going."

Ellie was barely listening. Glancing at her watch, she said that she would have to get going if she wasn't to miss her plane. "I'm told the station has me booked at the Commodore. You can reach me there."

He watched her helplessly. "Will you call me every day to let me know you're OK? At least do that for me?"

"I promise," she said, muttering under her breath: That is, if I'm still in one piece.

After she left, Whittier continued to gaze out the window and look at the planes taking off and landing in the dimming evening light. He waited until the Pan Am jet taking Ellie and Kayyim to Paris had vanished before making his decision.

It was possible to find everything he needed in the shops that were located in the airport complex: the clothes, the toilet articles, everything. He had his passport with him already. When he purchased everything he thought necessary, he put a call in to his partner and then to his sister, the only two people he considered important enough to notify. He said he was going off to Europe for perhaps a week. He would cable or call in a few days to let them know exactly where he'd be staying.

Both his partner and his sister were astonished. He had never done anything so impulsive before. On the other hand, he hardly ever got away and as he was his own boss no one was about to deny him the luxury of a week's holiday. They might have if they had realized where he intended to take that holiday.

CHAPTER

Seven

It was first-class all the way. Kayyim would settle for nothing less. Harry sat directly behind him while his Libyan bodyguard occupied the seat next to the minister. Harry might have saved Kayyim's life, but that did not entitle him to become the man's confidant. They exchanged scarcely more than a dozen words the entire time it took the Pan Am jet to cross the American continent and the Atlantic Ocean. Kayyim didn't say much to his bodyguard either, confining his interest to a sheaf of documents that he spread out in front of him. Harry tried to get a look at what these documents were but all he could make out were a series of numbers and Arabic words. Maybe he should have taken a Berlitz course before undertaking this mission.

According to Connelly, who'd briefed him just before he got on board the plane, all he was supposed to do was stay with Kayyim until they landed at Beirut Airport where presumably he'd be met by other Libyans who would replace him. Then he'd simply turn right around and come home. That was the plan. But as always there was to be room for improvising should circumstances dramatically alter.

Harry kept dozing off, not having gotten a good night's sleep in several days. From time to time, he'd awaken to see the bodyguard staring at him as if he were trying to puzzle out some unfathomable secret about him.

Harry knew just what it was. The bodyguard might very well have caught a glimpse of him at the Avila Hotel last night and was attempting to make the connection. At one point, it appeared that he had succeeded. He frowned like someone who thought he'd put sugar in his tea and found he'd made a mistake and put salt in instead.

Then he turned and muttered something to Kayyim in Arabic. Kayyim couldn't resist the temptation to glance around. When his eyes met Harry's, he merely smiled and asked if everything were all right, whether he needed more food or drink—(non-alcoholic, naturally)—or perhaps another pillow. Harry assured him that he was fine and Kayyim returned to his mysterious documents.

They were over the first large body of land that Harry had seen since Newfoundland and he assumed it to be Ireland. That meant it was only a couple of hours, at the outside till they made Paris. It was

entirely possible that Kayyim would have arranged for one of his agents to meet him at Orly, and not wait for Beirut. It was also possible that if Kayyim suspected that Harry had been involved in last night's incident, he might see to it that Harry was killed before the plane refueled and the crew changed. Kayyim was undoubtedly adept at plotting assassinations on short notice. He decided that from here on in he would have to stay very much awake. Dozing off for even five minutes might mean a far longer sleep than he had reckoned on.

As the Pan Am jet set down at Orly, the pilot announced that all those continuing on to Istanbul, Beirut, Damascus, Kuwait, and Abu Dubai, while permitted to leave the plane, were obliged to remain in the transit terminal of the airport. There they could dine if they wished and make purchases in the duty-free shop.

Harry waited for instructions from Kayyim as to what he wanted him to do during the stopover.

Kayyim said that he would stay on board and catch up on his work. "I have Achmed with me. I will be safe here, have no worry. Why don't you get some exercise, stretch your legs?"

Achmed gave Harry such a weird gold-capped smile that Harry was loath to go anywhere. But it would not do to protest. He casually left the two and proceeded to join the others who were filing out of the plane.

It was only after he reached the international transit building that he spied Ellie. Or rather she spied him.

"I don't believe this," he said. "No, I take that back. I believe it all right."

"Surprised?"

She had been confined to the economy class which was why Harry had not seen her during the flight. Her station might spring for a trip to Beirut but not the frills that could go with it.

"Surprised isn't the word I had in mind, Miss Winston."

"Shit," she said, "Miss Winston again. Don't you ever give up?"

"Don't you?"

He was walking quickly though there wasn't anywhere to go and escaping her was patently impossible, particularly in the transit building of Orly Airport.

"You wouldn't want to tell me what you've discovered about Kayyim, would you?"

"No, But I don't imagine it much matters. You'll probably find out

anyway."

"I'm telling you, Callahan, we would make a great team, you and I, if you'd let me in on the game."

"We're going into a war zone and you're making it sound like it's a hockey face-off."

"You sound just like my boyfriend."

"Well, that might be because your boyfriend's a sensible fellow, ever think of that?"

He decided that he had nothing more to say to the relentless anchor woman of Station KCVO and turned away. He started toward the duty-free shop which a horde of tourists had descended upon in hope of snatching up untaxed cigarettes, liquor, and Sony radios. Ellie did not pursue him this time. But she kept watching him.

Suddenly he heard her shout to him.

He whipped about at the sound of his name and saw a man he judged to be about sixty-five, a couple of inches taller than he was, step up to him with a gun so small it almost disappeared in the cup of his hand. The silencer attachment protruding from it gave its presence away.

Harry dived, unbalancing a shopper who lost his grip on a bottle of Bacardi's. The bottle smashed to the floor and created such a disturbance that no one heard the muffled report of the gun.

The shop window, however, collapsed. Glass slivers went flying among a tour group, leaving many of them with gashes and sharp razor-like cuts.

Harry rolled along the aisle of the shop because no other course of action was open to him. Any number of people were in his way. They protected him, but at the same time were exposed to the line of fire.

The man who'd just tried to kill him had gone. As soon as Harry realized he was safe he got off the floor and, ignoring the protests of the confused travelers on all sides of him, raced from the shop into the terminal proper. Ellie said nothing but pointed out the direction in which the assailant had fled.

Harry rushed headlong in pursuit; the man had only a few seconds on him, and there was no way he could leave this part of the airport without having to pass through customs which would delay him for a considerable period of time

Moreover, the man was tall and should not be difficult to pick out.

Harry did not want to use his gun if he could help it. He was in a diplomatically touchy situation here, on French territory but not yet,

officially, in France. Already airport security personnel were heading towards the duty-free shop to see what had been the cause of all this commotion. They would find cut-up people and a window partially shot out and nothing else but witnesses with a great great many conflicting stories.

No one seemed to take notice of Harry, probably assuming that he was simply in a hurry to get to a plane that was minutes away from departing.

He reconnoitered the entire terminal, but the man was nowhere to be seen. There was no sign of him at customs or anywhere else, neither in the shops nor the restaurants nor the kiosks.

As he started back, resigned to losing his quarry, an electronic chime sounded over the speaker system followed by an announcement in French that his Pan Am flight was taking on passengers for the next lap of its journey to the Mideast.

Then he caught sight of Ellie. He realized that she was quietly signaling him. There was one place he hadn't checked in his search, mainly because he never thought of it as a hiding place for a killer. But he could understand why Ellie had found out about it. She was gesturing towards a door to her right.

The outline of a woman on the door indicated the purpose the room inside served.

Ellie sidled up to him and whispered, "He went in there a few minutes ago. I think I heard a scream, I'm not sure. There may be someone in there with him. Maybe more than one."

Overhead the speaker came to life again: "Attention. Pan Am Numero Quarante-Six à départer en cinq minutes."

"You've got five minutes," Ellie said.

"Go back on board. If I don't get there watch Kayyim for me."

"Am I to infer that I am now part of the team?"

"It sure looks like it, doesn't it, Miss Winston?"

She wished him luck, not with words, she said nothing, but with her eyes. She had very expressive eyes. Harry began to understand why she made such a good anchorwoman.

Then she fell in with the rest of the passengers, quickening her pace as she approached the departure gate.

As soon as the corridor emptied and there was no one nearby to observe him, Harry edged open the ladies' room door, very cautiously, no more than an inch. A sufficient gap was created for him to get an idea of the situation inside.

All he could see was one wall, but this one wall was covered entirely by a mirror. In the mirror the gunman was visible, so was his hostage, a terrified woman whose skirt was bundled up about her knees. There was no question she'd been taken by surprise; her eyes were filled with tears and she was whimpering very softly. Her captor held one hand over her lips; the other had a gun to her head.

He must have heard the door opening for Harry saw he adjusted his position and pulled the woman closer to him as though to make it clear how little mobility she had.

Harry had the advantage of knowing where his opponent was, whereas the gunman could only see the door slightly ajar. He would have no way of knowing who was behind it.

Then Harry moved, firing his Magnum not at the gunman, who was too well hidden by the woman, but at the mirror. The roar of the Magnum was distraction enough, particularly in such a small space with all the enamel and tiled surfaces to echo off of. But the damage done to the mirror was of greater significance; glass erupted in every direction, raining down on hostage and captor alike, slicing them both so that suddenly their flesh all but vanished under a coating of blood. It was as though they'd broken out in a rash simultaneously. Too bad about the woman, Harry thought, but there was no other way to do it. Better to endure some nasty cuts than die.

As he had anticipated, the gunman had released his hold on the woman, too preoccupied by the pain and by the ringing in his ears to maintain custody of her. When the woman screaming in terror, slipped away from him, Harry fired a second round, this time at the man himself.

The man was struck fatally in the chest and the momentum of the round was powerful enough to send him reeling backwards through the door of one of the stalls, leaving him slumped awkwardly on the toilet with blood dripping steadily down his chest. His eyes were still open and he had the look of a man too long constipated.

The woman fled. The last Harry saw, she was running down the corridor, possibly thinking that he too posed a threat. There was still no one in the vicinity but he did not expect that this state of affairs would last for long; someone must have heard the two gunshots.

Meanwhile, a woman with a very ingratiating voice announced the last call for passengers boarding Pan Am Flight Forty-Six to Istanbul, Beirut, and points further east.

Harry hastily dug through the pockets of the man he had just killed and found two items of interest: a wallet and a passport. He slipped both into his pockets, having no time to examine either, and left the

ladies' room. A wealthy looking woman of advanced years was about to enter. She scowled at Harry when he emerged, no doubt wondering what he was doing in territory off-limits to the male sex.

Harry began to race in the direction of the departure gate, prepared for the scream that he was sure must come as soon as the woman discovered the condition of the ladies' room and the condition of the man who was still in it. The scream came all right, but it was much louder and higher pitched than he'd have thought humanly possible. It was a scream to wake the dead though not necessarily a man with a slug from a .44 magnum inside him.

But by the time the airport security and police arrived at the scene, Harry was already on board his plane. He was the last person on. The cabin door was closed moments after he entered.

Casually, he advanced along the aisle toward first class which was divided from the economy section by a beige curtain.

Ellie was seated on an aisle seat. She saw him coming but gave no sign of recognition. As Harry approached her, he whispered, "I owe you one."

"I owed you one," she replied in an equally low voice, "I was just returning the favor."

"See you in Beirut," he said, smiling, and continued on his way.

Achmed and Kayyim were just where he'd left them. They didn't turn around until he took the seat behind them. They probably hadn't been expecting to see him back. Achmed's face darkened at the sight of Harry and he muttered something in Arabic that Harry was certain had to do with his mother. There is an art to cursing in Arabic. With an astonishing variety of abuse possible, an insult might lead to a blood feud persisting for generations. Harry had the sense Achmed was running through the entire spectrum of curses under his breath. Kayyim, on the other hand, being a more reserved sort, responded only with a mild look of reproach, as if it were bad form for Harry to still be alive.

Then, in a very pleasant way, he asked if Harry had enjoyed the stopover.

"Let's say I got plenty of exercise," Harry replied, and Kayyim nodded as if he knew exactly what Harry was talking about.

The Small Man hated Muzak. He would willingly have blown out the speakers or blown up L.A.'s airport just as he had San Francisco's, but neither option was available to him at the moment. For his sole responsibility now was to follow Ellie Winston and keep the Alpha

Group aware of her movements. Obviously, he had done a wretchedly bad job because here he was in San Francisco while she was in Paris or wherever she had decided to go to after Paris.

Now he was in a telephone booth attempting once again to contact the unit commander who'd assigned him to track Winston in the first place.

At least this time he had managed to reach the commander who listened impatiently to his account of how he had lost her.

"How was I to know she was going to jump aboard a jetliner to Europe?" he asked plaintively. "San Diego, Vegas, Tijuana, all right, but Europe? I tried getting hold of you, but you were nowhere to be found."

The unit commander was not interested in his excuses. "You have your credentials in order?"

"Naturally." He had several different collections of credentials in order, in fact, depending on which alias he chose to use.

"Do you think you can possibly catch up with her?"

The Small Man hesitated, but as he glanced out of the phone booth he caught sight of the man Winston had met in a nearby restaurant just before she embarked on her flight. He now had a small suitcase in his hand which he had not had before. The suitcase not only looked new but there was even a tag dangling from it that the man had neglected to remove after purchasing it. The Small Man had a sense of what this man was up to.

"Well, answer my question." The unit commander had an imperious nature and infrequently abided undisciplined behavior.

"Yes," the Small Man said, "I think I can catch up with her. There's someone here who can lead me right to her."

"Good then. Check in with me when you have her in contact again."

The Small Man rung off and stepped out into the lounge. He was no longer so acutely conscious of the dreadful Muzak. He had David Whittier to concentrate on.

CHAPTER

Eight

At the first available opportunity, Harry slipped into the first-class lavatory and inspected the wallet and passport that he'd purloined from the man at Orly.

The wallet contained an interesting sum of money, in several currencies: U.S., French, Lebanese, British, Jordanian, and Libyan. The man traveled a lot, Harry thought, and his conclusion was borne out by the passport which was blurred with indecipherable stamps from a dozen or more countries in the Middle East and Europe. His name was Muhammed Ajai though Harry doubted very much whether it was the name his parents had given him at birth. The passport indicated also that his nationality was Palestinian.

Kayyim must have been responsible for the attack on him; how he had managed to get word to Ajai without physically leaving the plane was the thing Harry couldn't figure out. Most likely there was a confederate aboard—another passenger or even one of the members of the flight crew—who not only passed on Kayyim's command, but also pointed out the victim.

Kayyim would have realized by now that the attempt had failed and Harry suffered from no illusions that he wouldn't try again. In Beirut he would have an easier time of it; there in a city already torn by warfare who would notice one more dead body?

Whatever happened, he prayed that Ellie could be kept out of it. Bad enough he was marked for murder; if she was linked with him in any way she would surely be marked as well.

From the air, Beirut looked peaceful enough. The endless blue skies and the bright summer sun combined to create a deceptive atmosphere of tranquility. One of the flight attendants was heard to remark that the airport had opened only the previous day after a week's shutdown due to incessant shelling. For some people the very act of landing in a plane is bad enough; to know that somebody might be waiting to blow you to kingdom come once you actually got down, was even more disheartening.

But it was quiet on the airfield. It was quiet even for a normal

airfield. That there was very little traffic was understandable; a country doesn't get a lot of tourists and businessmen coming and going in the middle of a war—unless those businessmen happened to be selling weapons of death.

Here is where the shit hits the fan, Harry thought. Kayyim had been told that Harry was supposed to turn right around which would mean that there was no need to leave the airport. Nor did Harry really care to, in spite of the simple curiosity of seeing where Kayyim was going in Beirut.

But it seemed that Kayyim had other ideas. "Mr. Turner," he said, "would you do me the honor of accepting my hospitality for tonight? After all, you have come all this way and risked your life for me, it is the least I can do. To get on another plane and endure the ordeal of another air flight to the States is foolish. You would feel so much better if you rested tonight and went back in the morning."

Harry knew he should decline, but something caused him to accept the invitation. Maybe his curiosity was even greater than he thought. In any case, he only hoped that Kayyim adhered to the famous Islamic and Bedouin customs governing the welfare of a guest. A man might be your deadly enemy, but if he came into your house you were obligated to serve him in every way you could; then in the morning, as soon as he was on his way again, you were free to kill him.

Of course, in a city where militiamen break into a hospital and start spraying the patients with machine gun fire you couldn't count on anything, least of all old Islamic traditions.

Kayyim expressed his delight when Harry agreed though Achmed looked none too pleased which was, for Harry, not a bad sign.

"Good. Then you come with me. We will have no trouble with customs. I am well known in Beirut."

Before they could disembark, one of the flight attendants approached Harry and surreptitiously deposited a folded piece of paper in the pouch facing his seat, squashing it between the in-flight magazine and the air sickness bag.

When he was certain that neither Kayyim nor his bodyguard were observing him, he retrieved the paper and unfolded it:

> I'm staying at the Commodore. I'll also have access to the U.S. Embassy and to the station in S.F. and the network in N.Y. So if you need anything or need to contact anyone let me know. I'm holding the fort for you. E.

Harry quietly tore up the note and scattered the shreds in a way

such that the note could never be reassembled. For the second time today, he had to admit that having Ellie around was not the worst thing that could have happened to him. She'd saved his life in Paris, who knows but he might have to call on her to do the same in Beirut.

As Kayyim promised, customs posed no difficulty. The three of them were passed right through without any official glancing at either their papers or their baggage. There were certain advantages to being a sponsor of terrorism with millions of dollars to spend. For one thing, one probably got invited to lots of parties.

A limousine, armor-plated with bullet-resistant glass and equipped with a machine gun mounted on the trunk that could be operated by the passengers within, was waiting to receive the minister and his party of two. In any other country, a fortified car like this would have made Harry feel quite secure. But not here in Beirut.

A shrill whine woke him that seemed to electrify the air. What made sure that he was awake was the enormous explosion that followed the whine. Within seconds, the walls began to shudder and the glass in the windows cracked further.

Unaccustomed to waking up in the middle of the war, Harry was not immediately able to orient himself. For one thing, his whole system was out of whack, from the exhausting journey that had taken him thousands of miles from California, and all the food and drink he'd consumed along the way. He had no idea how long he'd slept; his watch was missing. The only thing he could say for certain was that it was daylight, from the angle of the sun, midafternoon. Another rocket came down somewhere in the vicinity, and another, and another. It was unnerving, listening to them, and downright discouraging when one began to realize one of them might come careening down right on top of you. How did people get used to this sort of thing? Harry wondered.

He had a plan, he remembered that quite distinctly. It had seemed to him a reasonably good plan too. He had intended to go with Kayyim only so far, discover where he was staying in the city, then slip away. He had even worked out a way to do this; aside from Achmed and the chauffeur, Kayyim had no other protection that Harry could see. No one had relieved Harry of his weapon.

But he should have known that on his own territory, Kayyim would play by other rules, rules that Harry was unacquainted with. It could be that he hadn't been thinking straight, that the torturously long plane trip combined with the incident at Orly had knocked more than the wind out of him.

Otherwise, why would he be here in a large white room somewhere in the middle of Beirut? Possibly he'd been drugged, more likely he'd collapsed because his body had given out. He tried the door; it didn't budge. He stepped over to the windows; they were arched and once had probably yielded a panoramic view. But now they were so cracked from the noise of explosives that you could barely see out of them. They, too, were locked. Breaking them wouldn't be difficult but it would hardly make sense. It seemed that Harry was very high up and there was nothing out there but a sheer drop that would leave a man looking like a pool of jelly when he came to the end of it.

His watch wasn't all that was missing; gone too were his gun—that was to be expected—his wallet, his passport, as well as Muhammed Ajai's wallet and passport. Harry had the feeling that the only reason he'd been spared thus far was because Kayyim was anxious to find out how much the U.S. authorities knew about his operations.

There was a pitcher of water gone lukewarm some time during the night. That was all the refreshment available. A bedpan had also been provided. These two items evidently constituted Kayyim's notion of hospitality.

Harry thought he had nothing to lose by pounding on the door to see what kind of response he would get.

None was the answer.

He sat back on the bed. Nothing to do but wait and listen to rockets turn what little that was left intact in Beirut into rubble.

Without any way of measuring time more accurate than the relative position of the sun in the sky, Harry couldn't say whether twenty minutes or two hours had gone by when he heard the key turn in the lock. The wait had been endless. But he did not necessarily welcome an end to it.

With Kayyim was the inevitable Achmed. But two other men had come along, perhaps thinking the show would be well worth the price of admission. They all had the air of men who liked pumping a great many volts of electricity into people.

"You slept comfortably?" Kayyim inquired. He was no less cordial than he'd been on the plane, but he was no more sincere.

"You have any cold water?" Harry asked, gesturing to the pitcher. "This has gone stale."

"That can be arranged . . . later."

Later, thought Harry dismally. How much later?

Kayyim circled Harry, hands clasped behind his back. His friends stood by, evidently restless for him to get on with it.

“You killed Muhammed Ajai,” Kayyim said flatly.

“He was ready to do the same to me.”

“Muhammed Ajai was a good man,” Kayyim muttered. “You are an agent of the U.S. imperialist clique.”

“I wouldn’t put it that way,” Harry replied.

“But you don’t deny that you are an agent?”

“It wouldn’t do any good to ask you to let me contact the U.S. Embassy?” Harry was feeling a little giddy. Even though his life was in peril he somehow could not quite take this whole affair seriously. Imperialist clique indeed.

“No, I am afraid it wouldn’t. You are with the CIA.”

He was not making it a question.

“No, I am with the San Francisco Police Department. It’s just that I took a wrong turn somewhere along the way.”

Kayyim exchanged a few words with the man standing next to Achmed. Suddenly, they were all laughing. Kayyim returned his attention to Harry. “If you do not tell us the truth we will be forced to take measures.”

Harry had an idea what kind of measures he was referring to, but said nothing.

“What does the CIA know about me? Why did it stage a deliberate provocation in California?”

Harry presumed he was talking about the assassination attempt, but he could no more answer Kayyim’s first question than he could his second. He kept silent.

This silence infuriated Kayyim who struck him savagely with his hand, turning first one cheek, then the other, a fiery shade of red. Still Harry didn’t react.

“Well, then, if you refuse to say anything you shall accompany us downstairs.”

Downstairs was the cellar and it was reached by several steep flights that descended through hallways composed of dull gray cinder blocks.

Harry was flanked by Achmed on one side and another man in a camouflage suit on his other. They held his arms in a painful grip. Kayyim was a few steps in front of him and the fourth was bringing up the rear with a Soviet Makarov. The only thing Harry knew about the Makarov was that it discharged a 9 x 18 mm cartridge and that while it was not very powerful, it was effective at close range. The man behind him was scarcely twelve inches away. To Harry that was very

close range.

From what Harry could gather, this was an apartment building of some kind, but he saw no one else on the stairs. It might be that the building was inhabited entirely by sympathizers of Kayyim's cause. Harry doubted whether he was the first person to visit "downstairs."

Even with the cinder blocks and the outside walls of the structure, the rumble of the rockets and the artillary fire was still audible and from time to time the stairs vibrated in response.

They had gotten to the second floor—Harry could gaze down and see the grim gray door that led to the cellar—when the whole building seemed to rock, and cement and plaster and other debris came cascading down, accompanied by poisonous fumes. All at once the stairwell was filled with dense black smoke.

Harry realized an opportunity when he saw one. Though his eyes stung and he was gagging like his captors, he concentrated his energies on hurtling himself down the remaining stairs, dragging with him Achmed and his companion. The momentum of his forward motion was such that it took the three of them right into Kayyim who couldn't see where he was going. Kayyim, with a curse that got lost in a coughing fit, tumbled and fell—but fell where? Harry couldn't see; he had vanished into the smoke. But that was not his immediate concern—he just wanted to get the hell out of this place.

Achmed smashed into a wall and surrendered his hold on Harry. But the man in the camouflage suit, hung on tenaciously. The man behind fired his Makarov though what he thought he was aiming at was hard to say. His eyes smarting, his lungs aching with the smoke and the lack of oxygen, Harry took his free hand and sent a hard right into the man's face. Because his eyes were tearing as copiously as Harry's he hadn't seen the blow coming and with a cry, he pitched back, his nose a bloody shambles, releasing his grip as well.

Harry struggled back the way he came, hoping to find a door that could take him to freedom. The man with the Makarov seemed to have the same idea. Because when Harry got to the next landing and found a door which, mercifully, had not been locked, he was waiting for him. Right behind the door.

But there was smoke funneling into this adjoining corridor too, and when he fired it was the smoke that he hit and not Harry. Harry dropped to the floor. The man fired again. The bullet singed his scalp, leaving a trail of blood over his right ear. As he stepped back to adjust his aim and get farther away from the smoke, Harry picked himself up and plowed right into him, butting him in the chest with his head.

The Makarov flopped out of his hand. He attempted to grab it, but

Harry scooped it up and fired it. The man crumbled slowly, his knees buckling, then giving way, finally he was sucked into the smoke and could be seen no more.

A faint glimmer of light up ahead inspired Harry to accelerate his pace in spite of the growing pain in his chest. Behind him there was a great deal of commotion, shouts, and detonations, but when he looked back he could see nothing other than whorls of toxic smoke.

True to the promise of the light, there was a route of egress that took him out of the building. The shelling seemed to have temporarily abated although sporadic sniper fire could be heard coming from various points in the neighborhood.

At first, Harry's appearance did not excite very much interest. Most of those who had gathered out front—and the vast majority of them were clad in paramilitary uniforms and brandished AK47's—were busy trying to extinguish the fire that the explosion had caused or else were watching the proceedings with varying degrees of excitement. Some looked plain bored, as though this was such a routine occurrence that it wasn't worth making much of a fuss over.

From this new vantage point, Harry could see better the damage the rocket attack had inflicted on the building in which he'd been held prisoner. Much of the roof had caved in, and two of the upper floors were no longer there at all. At least Kayyim had a good sense of timing. Had he decided to pay a call on Harry ten minutes after he did, Harry might not have been alive to greet him.

Not all the commandos were so preoccupied by the fire that Harry could evade detection entirely. Because Harry was tall and a Westerner, and because in all the confusion he had forgotten to hide the Makarov, he aroused a certain suspicion in the mind of at least one teenager who carried his Soviet-made automatic with as much confidence as a veteran of several wars.

He called to Harry in Arabic, but Harry did not respond. Never mind that he didn't know Arabic, he knew very well what the youth wanted—an explanation for his presence in their midst. Having none, Harry smiled at him and continued on across the street, hoping to take refuge among a cluster of buildings, a few of which had so far escaped devastation.

But the youth was not about to let Harry go so easily. He rounded up a few of his cronies and pointed Harry out to them. It was as though Harry was a strange specimen of jungle life that had suddenly been sprung loose from a zoo. Now they were all shouting to him, both in Arabic and French. There could be no doubting the message they were communicating. "*Arretez*! *Arretez*!"

But Harry had no intention of stopping. He kept right on going, quickening his step as he took in deep draughts of air, welcoming the relief of oxygen after so much smoke.

Though he was walking away from them—and there were now four or five of them—he did not permit them out of his sight.

He saw that the one who had pointed him out to begin with was about to imbue his verbal command with the authority of his AK47. Raising it to his shoulder, he sighted Harry and again issued his order to halt.

Harry did not need to be convinced of the gravity of the situation. This boy would not hesitate to fire, if only to show his friends that he was as heroic as the kids down the block. It was Beirut's way of keeping up with the Joneses.

Very carefully, Harry turned so that he was nearly facing the youth. The others had not raised their weapons; instead they were watching with amused expressions, as though this was really a game, like soccer, in which death was no more serious than a knee injury.

Other than this small group, no one else seemed to be aware of what was happening. Harry believed that it would only be a matter of minutes before Kayyim recovered enough to mount a full-scale search for him.

Still facing the youth, he began to back away. The youth shouted at him again to halt, more vehemently this time, somewhat incredulous that Harry persisted in disobeying him.

Now his companions brought their Kalashnikovs up and trained them on Harry. This brought him to a complete halt. The expressions on the faces of these youths were deadly serious; they had killed before and were ready to again. It occurred to Harry that he did not know who these teenagers were, whether they were leftists or rightists, Christian Phalangists or Moslems or Palestinians. It was bad enough to die violently, but it was worse when one didn't know whose cause was sending one to that grave.

The group of them approached Harry, cautiously, for he held the Makarov even though they kept signaling him to drop it.

Then there was a loud report from somewhere overhead. Harry looked up and at first saw nothing, then he gazed back at the youth directly in front of him. There was a small round red hole in his forehead the size of a dime. He seemed to be reflecting on this latest development, but the reflection didn't last long. He dropped to the ground. No sooner had he done so, than there was a barrage of gunfire, all coming from overhead.

Another dropped, a third tried scuttling across the street before a round caught him in the crook of his back and sent him sprawling. Another managed to dodge the hail of bullets, only to pivot about at the last moment and take a shot at Harry, perhaps because he blamed him for this sudden onslaught. His bullet never found its target. But his action invited a response. Harry's aim was better, and in any case, he'd had more practice.

The youth spun about, his AK47 clattering to the ground. When he managed to draw his hands away from the wound, he found that there was very little left of his stomach. The shock was too much for him; he slipped down by a heap of sandbags to watch his life ebb away.

By this point, Harry had disappeared, taking refuge inside an abandoned grocery store whose protective barricade, composed of corrugated metal, was easily removed. Through the shuttered window of the store, Harry had a view of the building he'd just escaped from.

He decided to wait there amid the rank smells of rotting fruits and vegetables. In the darkness, Harry hoped that sooner or later Kayyim would reappear and lead him to whomever it was he had come to Beirut to see. In the meantime, he gave silent thanks for preserving him this far though it wasn't God to whom his gratitude was intended. Since God was probably too far up in the heavens to care, Harry directed his thanks to the anonymous snipers for whom heaven was an asphalt rooftop.

CHAPTER

Nine

The intermittent shelling bothered her at first, though she could imagine adapting to it if she had to. More aggravating were the deafening sonic booms that shook the city every time Israeli F16's flew over on reconnaissance and bombing missions.

Sleep under such circumstances was nearly impossible, and after trying for several hours, she abandoned the effort. Though she had certainly expected no tourists roaming through the lobby and corridors of her hotel, she had not expected quite so many journalists, nor would she have believed that they could conduct their lives as though there was nothing unusual about nonstop sniper fire and constant artillary bombardment.

There were not, however, many female journalists, and none who were as attractive and elegant as Ellie Winston, and so she had little difficulty eliciting the attention and interest of a number of men. As war correspondents, they inevitably were skeptical of her capabilities, especially when they learned that her only experience to date had been as a local San Francisco anchorwoman.

But more important than clothes and visuals was the for dinner and volunteering to scrounge about those few fashionable boutiques left open in the city for additions to her travel-depleted wardrobe. She spent her first day acquainting herself with these men, accepting three lunch engagements and two dinner engagements—all scheduled at hour intervals so that she could make them, more or less, on time, and always in a different restaurant—disappointing her dates by refusing food, claiming an uncertain stomach. But she did drink a glass of wine with each so that she could keep her resolve.

Without Harry around, without even knowing where in Beirut he might be, she had to use her own ingenuity. She had to get new clothes, and this she was able to accomplish with the aid of her male admirers who carried her dimensions with them on a slip of paper. She needed also to find a camera crew or failing that, a man armed with a Nikon who could supply her with the visuals necessary to supplement the story she hoped to have by the time she was ready to return home.

But more important than clothes and visuals, was the story itself.

And that was the real reason she accepted invitations from these veteran correspondents to dine and drink with them. Most of them had been in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East for years, reporting on coups and massacres, air strikes, hijackings, and wars. Certainly, Kayyim's name would have come up in a variety of situations over the years. Ellie, far from making a show of her knowledge, feigned a kind of naiveté, confirming in the minds of the men who met her their original opinion of her—that she was beautiful and charming and good company, but hardly much of a reporter.

"Kayyim?" one of them, a *LeMonde* correspondent, asked. "How does it come that you know of him?"

Ellie explained that she had seen him deliver a speech in L.A., adding that several million dollars went with this speech.

"Notorious, *très dangereuse*," was the Frenchman's verdict. But he would add nothing to this. Ellie was already aware of how notorious and dangerous he was.

More forthcoming was the representative of *The London Telegraph.*

"Kayyim, bloody Kayyim," he said. "Is he in town? Last I heard he was home in Tripoli."

"No, he came over here from the U.S. Any idea why he'd be here?"

The *Telegraph* man threw up his hands. "It could be any number of reasons. Kayyim is always coming through here. The word is he's a middleman, buying weapons from some bloke here, then seeing that they're shipped to whatever part of the world Qaddafi wants to stir up trouble."

"You wouldn't have any idea who this arms dealer might be?"

The Englishman shook his head. "I've heard rumors, there's nothing but rumors in Beirut, rumors and blood, but that's not generally the sort of thing I cover. No one's interested actually. Not with so much killing going on. But there is someone who might know."

"Can this person be found?"

"With no problem. Tomorrow, if you'd like, we can go to him. He should be on the golf course at the usual time, around nine."

"Golf?"

"Yes, of course, a jolly good player he is too."

"But golf in the middle of this madness?"

The *Telegraph* man seemed surprised at the question. "Nine holes every day. You've got to stay sane somehow, you know."

Ellie agreed to meet him in the hotel lobby at eight so that she

could talk to this indefatigable golfer and perhaps discover who Kayyim's Beirut contact was. She dearly hoped she could get to him before Harry did. Although Harry had made a few concessions to her, she was certain he still regarded her as a nuisance. She meant to prove him wrong.

Politely, she declined a nightcap with the gentleman from *The Telegraph,* insisting that she was exhausted, what with no sleep, jet lag and all the wine she'd consumed.

She got herself back to her room, discarded her clothes, which were damp from so much running about, pulled on a robe, and went into the bathroom to take a shower—that is if the hot water was still working.

The hot water was working, unlike a great many other things in Lebanon. With the water running, Ellie succeeded in blotting out the rumble of artillery that again threatened to disrupt the peace of Beirut's night just as it did its day.

Not only could she not hear the artillery outside the hotel, she could no longer hear what was taking place in her own room.

David Whittier thought that at any moment he might start hallucinating, he was so tired. It was hard for him to believe that he had actually reached his destination and was standing in the lobby of the Commodore Hotel. He only prayed that Ellie was here and hadn't changed her reservations or gone off to some other part of the world in endless pursuit of war and insurrections.

The clerk behind the desk gazed up at him with puzzlement.

"May I help you, sir?" he asked in correct English that reflected an education abroad,

"Yes, I am looking for a Miss Ellie Winston, she's a U.S. citizen and I understand she's registered here."

With so few guests, the clerk had no difficulty recalling her. "Yes, sir, she is here." He checked the room number. "Would you like to see if she's in her room?"

Whittier was so relieved he had not come all this way for nothing that he temporarily forgot his plan to surprise her and signaled the clerk to do so.

The clerk stood for a while with the phone in his hand. Then he said, "I'm afraid, sir, she is not in her room. Would you like to leave a message?"

"Better than that, I'd like to have a room if one is available,"

It was probably not wise, he thought, to assume that she would want to share a room with him while she was on assignment. Still he requested a double in the hope that once he talked to her, she would come around and move in with him. He'd pictured this reunion so many times on the three airlines he'd had to take to get to Beirut that he no longer had any idea what to expect. Maybe she would greet him with open arms, grateful that she had such a bold and passionate lover who would follow her halfway around the world; or maybe she would upbraid him for intruding on her life and complicating an already messy situation.

No matter. He was here and she would just have to deal with it. Before he was ready to follow the porter up to his room, he asked the clerk if it was possible to purchase a bottle of champagne.

Tired as he was, he still meant to celebrate with Ellie, no matter what time she got in.

"Of course, sir. You may order from the bar. Alcohol is always on hand for our guests. Sometimes there is nothing else to do here but drink."

It was his only allusion to the internecine struggle going on in the city.

Whittier then leaned forward and thrust an American banknote into the clerk's hand. "You wouldn't mind telling me Miss Winston's room number, would you?"

The clerk appraised the denomination of the note and said that he wouldn't mind at all.

Neither the clerk nor Whittier realized that their entire exchange had been monitored by a man who sat in an overstaffed chair pretending to read a copy of the international edition of *Time*.

But as soon as the American had disappeared with the porter into the elevator, he sprang up from his chair and, using the stairs, hastened to Ellie Winston's room.

He might never again have an opportunity to bug the room and he intended to exploit it to the fullest. All the necessary electronic equipment had been provided to him on the stopover in London by Alpha Group's English based operatives. The Small Man had had plenty of practice installing miniature devices that could pick up both whispered conversations and discussions over the telephone.

There was no one in the hallway. From a room way off to the left, he could hear the raucous voices of bored journalists playing yet another round of poker.

On the off chance Ellie had come back in the brief interval since the

clerk had called up to her room, he rapped lightly on the door. Hearing no response, he easily tripped the lock with a credit card—a false one, naturally—and let himself in.

It was only then that he heard the shower running. His first impulse was to return later. But then he decided he would stay and insert the bugs. There were only three of them and he was convinced he could plant them in just a few minutes.

He went about the installation of the devices as silently as he could in the event that she should suddenly shut off the shower. The phone would take the longest; to plant the bug, he had to partially disassemble the receiver. And so he put this off for the last. The other two were simply dropped into convenient locations—one behind the bedboard, the other on the underside of the bureau.

As he prepared to twist off the speaking component from the receiver, he stopped, at the sound of footsteps. It was too late to do anything. There were voices, a key was turning in the lock.

Instinctively, the Small Man understood what had happened. Whittier—for he had in the course of their long journey learned his name—had been too impatient and had decided on waiting for Ellie in her own room. As he had bribed the clerk to tell him his lover's room number, he had undoubtedly bribed the porter to admit him into her room.

There was nowhere to hide. Certainly not in the bathroom. His only consolation was that the shower was still on and that Ellie was so far oblivious to the fact that her room had been invaded. He was under strict instruction not to give himself away. The tail was supposed to be discreet.

The door was open, the porter was gesturing the American inside. The Small Man took up a position behind the bureau where he would not immediately be seen.

Whittier thanked the porter and shut the door behind him. He stepped over to the bureau and set down a bottle on top of it. Champagne to celebrate their reunion.

It was only then that he heard the shower and realized that she was there after all.

He called to her, but not loud enough so that she could hear him over the surge of water.

At that point, the Small Man acted. The PK Walther he held in his hand possessed a silencer—which was ironic in a city where people announced their intention to kill with the thunderous discharge of mortars, machine guns, and howitzers,

“What the hell . . . ?” Whittier managed to get out. He was pale enough from the interminable flight. Now the sheets, turned down by the maid for the night, looked healthier than he did.

“Goodbye,” the Small Man said. Never having shown any hesitation before, the Small Man did not start now. Before Whittier could do so much as lift a finger, the Small Man fired twice—right into Whittier’s head.

The first bullet probably did not do too much damage; it entered his right cheek, but was deflected somehow by his teeth so that it ended coming out the left. An unseemly mess, but certainly not fatal. The second bullet, however, was better targeted and penetrated above the ridge of the nose, finding a home deep within the occipital lobe of the brain. The whites of his eyes clouded with blood and he fell to the floor.

With no time to concern himself with the telephone, the Small Man set about opening the door and dragging his victim out into the empty hallway. Despite his diminutive size, he possessed considerable strength in his wiry arms and he managed this task with a minimum of strain. Shutting the door behind him, he pulled the body halfway down the hall, careful to keep his head up so that he would not produce an unsightly trail of blood in his wake.

At the end of the hall, he found a door marked Incinerator and it was there he consigned his charge. Sooner or later someone would discover Whittier—without his papers which the Small Man had made certain to remove—whether whole or charred, but it would be of no consequence. Corpses were always turning up in Beirut, who would bother to worry about one more?

Then the Small Man went on his way.

Ellie felt refreshed now that her shower was over. It had been a long shower, but she felt it had been necessary to purge herself of the sweat and grime that had accumulated after more than twenty-four hours in this unholy capital. Wrapping herself in a towel, she opened the bathroom door and stepped into her room.

It was only when she seated herself before the mirror that she had the sense that something was not quite right, something in the room was out of place, but she would be damned if she could figure out what it was. Then she looked over to her right, close to the door that led out into the hallway, and saw the fresh bloodstains there. She suppressed a scream and went to the phone.

There was something wrong with the phone. So she threw on her

robe and hurried down to the lobby to demand another room. She was matter-of-fact about her reasons for doing so. She told the clerk her room had been broken into and blood left on her carpet. She assumed it was some sort of warning.

The clerk was apologetic and offered her her choice of rooms. In this season, with this war on, he said, finding a room was no problem.

The clerk believed nothing of her story. He assumed that her angry outburst had something to do with the appearance of the American registered in Room 617. That was why he failed to mention Whittier's arrival to her; he feared that he would only provoke her further and wind up being blamed for interfering in her personal life. Let the Americans handle it their own way, he figured, there were too many other conflicts going on without concerning himself with their domestic squabbles.

Although the break-in had thrown a scare into her, Ellie remained undaunted, and the following morning, promptly at eight, she was down in the lobby to meet Doug Lawson, the *Telegraph* correspondent. He had a cart full of clubs with him and a scrawny Lebanese boy whom Ellie assumed to be his caddy.

"Might as well get some playing in myself as long as we're going to be out there," he said.

Ellie shook her head but said nothing.

There might be a war on, and might be scars on the landscape from mortar shells, but the greens were still nicely kept up. Under an early sun that had already driven the thermometer up to eighty degrees, several golfers were making their way to the ninth hole. The city was relatively quiet at this hour, the only sounds were those of clubs thwacking balls and sprinklers jettisoning water over the lawns.

"Ah, there's our man!" Lawson said, pointing out a dour-faced man of indeterminate age. "And right on time too."

They hurried over to him, with the Lebanese boy trailing behind.

The man wore khakis and a bowler hat and had the air of a colonialist kept too long in a backwater province. He looked up to see who wanted him. He regarded Ellie in her chic white sleeveless dress with interest.

"Who is this you've got here, Lawson?"

"Miss Ellie Winston, San Francisco's contribution to anchorwomen."

"Ah, an anchorwoman," the man remarked. "That odd American phenomenon. The name is Vincent Hull." He took her hand in

greeting; Ellie was surprised to find that his grip was unsteady. Maybe palsy, more likely drink.

"Miss Winston is interested in running down Kayyim."

"Oh?" Hull turned his eyes back to the ball on the ground and with one elegant motion swung his club and sent the ball up into the air. It seemed to disappear into the blue of the horizon, but Hull apparently knew where it had gone—right into the rough. "Shit," he muttered and began marching to recover it. The others followed behind.

"Why are you so interested in Kayyim?"

Confidently, Ellie replied that she was pursuing a lead and that she hoped to discover how he financed an international terrorist network on behalf of his government.

"That could get you into trouble," Hull said.

"It already has."

This stopped him. He studied her for a moment. "Yes, I believe it has at that." He continued on until he came to the rough, then started his search for the ball. "You might say that I am an old Lebanese hand. Been around here for years. Was even here in the days Eisenhower sent the Marines landing on the beaches. I was here for the civil war in '75. Been here ever since." He paused for a moment, then added, "Which makes me a damn fool, don't you think?"

It was a rhetorical question, he didn't want or need an answer.

"So you want to find Kayyim," he continued. To Lawson he said, "You remember the old Pickwick?"

"The pub, yes, why?"

"Two doors down from it, on rue Makdessi, there's a building that in the last few months has been converted into a warehouse. Whenever Kayyim's in town that's where he eventually ends up,"

"And what's in this warehouse?" Ellie asked.

"Why, Miss Winston, I am surprised at you. I would have thought you'd already guessed. Arms, Miss Winston, enough arms to blow the entire Levant sky high."

"Could you take me there?"

Hull looked positively aghast. "Do you think I am mad? I haven't survived in this part of the world this long by going where I don't belong. You are welcome to commit suicide. Me, I prefer a slow fading into the twilight, if you don't mind,"

They left him there, scouring the rough for his lost ball. Ellie now posed the same question to Lawson that she had to Hull. But Lawson

was no more inclined to visit the warehouse on rue Makdessi than his acquaintance had been. “I think I prefer to play my nine holes and spend the afternoon over a few bitters actually. And I would recommend a similar schedule for you, Miss Winston. I shouldn’t go much farther with this, it could get rather sticky. If you know what I mean.”

But Ellie, knowing full what he meant, had every intention of paying a visit to the warehouse. She thanked Lawson for helping her get this far and left him at the first hole.

She had just gotten off the green when the first artillery barrage of the morning began. It was furious and loud—quite close. The answering fire, from Syrian peacekeeping forces, was equally loud—and equally close.

Directly overhead, there was a painful shriek as a rocket slued down toward the green. Ellie had been in Beirut only a day and a half, but it was long enough for her to comprehend the danger she was in. She threw herself down, her hands over her head, though this protective gesture was, she realized, a rather futile one.

The rocket landed several hundred yards downrange, producing an enormous roar and a black cloud of smoke. The battle continued, but no other rockets came near the golf course that morning. The fact that this one had hit the green was probably a mistake, an error committed by an artillery commander, a slight maladjustment in the sighting.

Whatever the case, this error had left a vast crater where the first hole had been, and nothing but a few shreds of clothing and charred bone to indicate that Doug Lawson and his caddy had once been among the living.

CHAPTER

Ten

Harry opened his eyes. He wasn't sure whether he had dozed off or not, but one thing was certain: he was fully conscious now. The lunatics were at it again, filling the air with gunfire and lobbing shells back and forth.

Peering out through the slats of the barrier, he renewed his vigil. He could not be sure that he hadn't missed Kayyim, but he decided he would wait another few hours before giving up. Having been in this abandoned grocery store for some fifteen hours, he was terribly thirsty. Hunger was there too, but he did not feel it nearly as acutely.

Not that he necessarily knew what he would do should Kayyim appear with his various associates. He was only one man, armed with a Soviet gun of uncertain reliability whose ammunition was virtually spent.

Nor had he a plan in mind for escaping his shelter should Kayyim fail to materialize. Across the street, there were perhaps two dozen commandos, some teenagers such as those that had confronted him the day before, others older and more experienced fighters from the looks of them. Having no uniform of his own, Harry would immediately draw their attention if he revealed himself, and there was no reason why they wouldn't turn their guns on him.

But whatever divine providence had aided him yesterday appeared to be at work again today. For suddenly two men, both wearing olive-green uniforms—to signify they belonged to some kind of army—drove up the street in a jeep and parked in front of the grocery store.

The man on the passenger side got out and walked resolutely across the street, disappearing into the apartment building. He left his driver sitting at the wheel.

Harry crawled out from under the barrier and, without attracting the notice of the listless driver, managed to get within spitting distance of the jeep.

The driver abruptly turned, spotted him, hesitated, then, clumsily, tried to wrest his handgun from its holster. Still keeping low, Harry bridged the distance that separated him from the vehicle, his Makarov directed at the driver's head.

Seeing the threat, the driver gave up any effort to resist. He was young and nervous, afraid that he would become another anonymous victim in this incomprehensible war.

Harry got into the jeep and gestured to the driver, since he had no words to communicate with him, indicating that he should back up all the way to the end of the block, just out of sight of the commandos in front of the building. This the driver did.

There, at the corner, half-concealed by a barricade of sandbags, the two of them sat, the nervous driver and Harry, who now had a second gun, seized from his captive, in this case, a serviceable .38 automatic. He would have preferred his Magnum back, but this was certainly an improvement.

Moreover, he found a pair of binoculars in the jeep and these he used to keep up his surveillance.

Around midmorning, when the sun was particularly fierce, Kayyim came into view. So did Achmed. Achmed wore a bandage on his right arm, probably an injury sustained in the fire yesterday. Couldn't have happened to a nicer fellow, Harry thought.

Not unexpectedly, Kayyim was accompanied by several other men who divided themselves into two cars, both armored limousines with tinted glass so that Kayyim's enemies, scattered throughout the city, wouldn't be able to see him in his passage from one sector to the other.

As soon as the two limousines started on their way, Harry told the driver to follow them. He complied.

But just as they passed by the apartment building, the officer whose jeep this was appeared. He saw his driver, he saw Harry, and his initial reaction was to wave in confusion as though this would be sufficient to get his jeep back.

When he realized finally that his jeep had been hijacked, he shrieked in outrage and gave orders to the commando standing nearby to open fire. With no time to aim, they fired blindly at the receding vehicle. But the fusillade was so intense, they could not help but achieve some success.

Bullets smashed into the chassis, but they did not stop the jeep. They did succeed, however, in stopping the driver who took several rounds in the back and one in the head. Harry, flattened as much as possible in the small space available to him, wrestled the wheel from the dying man's hands and fought to maintain control of the jeep before it went crashing onto the sidewalk where several intrepid vendors had set up stalls.

At last, he was beyond the line of fire and he risked sitting up again. Pushing the dead driver out into the street, he took over his place behind the wheel. To his dismay he found the driver had left the seat wet with blood.

The two limousines up ahead on Ramlet el-Baida Avenue were still in sight; it was impossible to determine whether their occupants were aware that they were being tailed. The sudden outbreak of gunfire should have alerted them. On the other hand, they might be so accustomed to unexpected incidents of violence that it simply made no difference to them.

Harry, having had no opportunity to acquaint himself with the geography of Beirut since his arrival, had no idea where he was going. So many streets were characterized by bombed-out buildings and scattered rubble that it was difficult to distinguish one neighborhood from the other. Where was the Christian sector, where the Moslem, and which was he in now? He knew that there was something called the Green Line which divided one from the other but how close he was to it was a perfect mystery to him.

The only thing he could be certain of was that he was on Chouron Street and that to his right there was a sign hanging over a darkened establishment which said: *La Grotte aux Pigeons.* The Grotto of Pigeons. He suspected that the pigeons had long ago flown away.

There was other traffic on this street, mostly military vehicles of one sort or another, half-tracks, and trucks with soldiers hanging off them. Now and then, an ambulance with the symbol of the Red Crescent screamed by. From time to time, he would spot some small evidence of normalcy: a klatch of women gathered around a fruit stand, arguing vociferously with the man who was weighing and selling them the produce, or a boy no older than ten speeding along on a skateboard, oblivious to the gunshots that periodically punctuated the silence.

Now the two limousines were slowing down; Harry could not make out why until the hulking form of a tank came into view. It bore Syrian markings. A roadblock.

Maybe this was the famous Green Line, maybe it was just another roadblock, but whatever it was, it did not bode well for Harry. He had no documents, after all, and he would be hard-pressed to explain how he came to have a jeep or why the driver's seat was covered with fresh blood. People might be able to get away with a great deal in this turbulent atmosphere but he didn't see how he could pull this one off.

A Syrian Army officer in a tight suit stepped up to the lead limousine and conferred briefly with the chauffeur. Then he waved the two cars through.

Harry hung back, as he was only half a block away from where the tank had taken up position, but the Syrian could see him and was gesturing to him to come forward and undergo inspection too. Harry considered his chances. The tank's gun was pointing down the street directly at him. There were three soldiers, as far as could see. Others presumably were in the tank.

Hell, he thought, I've gotten this far. No sense in going back; he would probably run into another roadblock no matter which direction he turned. Grasping the wheel in one hand, and gripping hold of the confiscated .38 in the other, he pressed his foot down all the way on the gas, and gunned the jeep forward. To avoid the gunfire, he lowered his head below the windshield although this meant that he couldn't see where he was going; he just hoped he got through the roadblock in one piece.

The Syrians had not quite anticipated this action and were slow to react. The turret of the tank revolved slightly while the gun was repositioned. There was a concussive roar as it discharged, throwing up a ball of fire and smoke, but the jeep was going so fast that the shell went far off its mark. The jeep rocked and listed back and forth, yet its momentum was undisturbed. Harry kept a tenuous grip on the wheel and steered the jeep forward.

A burst of gunfire tore the windshield apart, then all but ripped the windshield frame from its moorings. The right front wheel tire went flat, the jeep sank slightly in response, but it had been made to see military action, and it was a tough son of a bitch, and kept right on going.

Harry gave the wheel a sharp turn to the left, surprising his antagonists. There was a particularly loud hollow thud followed by a scream as the vehicle plowed into one of the soldiers and crushed him under its rear tires.

A sidelong glance disclosed a second soldier, backing away as he continued to fire his AKM. Harry returned the fire, surprising himself by hitting the man, not critically, but that didn't matter; the soldier, disabled with a leg wound, had thrown down his weapon which was all that Harry wanted.

This seemed to be a newer district of the city he was coming into. In any case, he took the first turn he could, temporarily forsaking his pursuit of the limousines. His own safety came first.

No one followed him, there was no more fire; he had the street, whichever street this was, to himself. But where Kayyim had gone was another matter entirely. He explored the streets, but failed to turn up any sign of him.

Then, when he was about to give up and find a phone to see if Ellie were still at the Commodore, he came upon the limos by chance. They were parked on the rue Makdessi, right at the corner of Hamra, in front of a desolate-looking place called the Pickwick.

Harry gratefully abandoned his hijacked jeep; it was so shot-up by this point that he doubted he could have taken it much farther even if he had wanted to.

There was no problem in figuring out where Kayyim had gone because a commando, with an AKM, had taken up position in front of a building two doors down from the Pickwick. There was no telling from looking at the door what went on inside; on the upper floors many of the windows were gone and to all outward appearances, the building looked uninhabited. But Kayyim was here for some reason and Harry hadn't come all this way, and endured two gun battles in less than a half an hour, not to discover what that reason was.

CHAPTER

Eleven

Ellie looked around, but the man who had led her to this place had vanished. He was a Lebanese Christian, she'd been told, who had managed somehow to eke out an existence as a guide and consultant to the international community of newsmen. For a small fortune, he had agreed to take her to the alleged arms warehouse, and had even directed her to a small, overgrown passageway that was not easily seen from the street. All she had to do was follow it, he said, and she would find herself in the back of the warehouse. Somehow, Ellie had assumed that he would accompany her down this passageway, but this did not turn out to be the case.

She was tired and distraught; no sooner had she recovered from one act of violence than she was confronted with another. Witnessing Lawson's death on the golf course earlier that morning had shocked her, not because the violence had struck at someone she actually knew, but because she didn't feel much one way or the other about it. Her nerves seemed to have deadened.

Yet she was sensitive enough to the danger that pervaded the city to recognize how greatly she was tempting fate. Having escaped death or injury on so many occasions over the last few days, she understood that unless she stopped her investigation soon her luck would inevitably run out.

But though she was aware of all this, she could not bring herself to call it quits and go home. Undoubtedly, David Whittier would be waiting for her. She'd tried calling him from the hotel that morning, but there'd been no answer at his home. It wasn't like him, generally he'd be there. However, she couldn't worry about David now.

The passageway seemed to zigzag. On either side were structures built of gray stone to which tendrils of ivy and vine clung. Broken pavement and chipped stone made the walking difficult. After proceeding along this passageway for two or three minutes, she came to a door that looked as though it hadn't been opened in some time; the hinges were rusty and when Ellie pulled, they squeaked loudly. The door wouldn't give. She struggled with it and finally pried it open enough to be able to step inside.

The smell that greeted her was full of age, moisture, and rot. It was

very dark. With her first step, Ellie stubbed her toe. She cried out, then quickly silenced herself. She listened to see if anyone had heard her. In contrast to the city outside, this place was soundless.

If she had known she would encounter something like this she would have brought along a flashlight, but by this time she understood how ill-prepared she was. Nonetheless, she proceeded cautiously, like a blind person, extending her hands to grope her way along.

After a short while, she discerned a trickle of light forming a triangular pattern on the floor. Evidently, it was coming from another room. She advanced toward it and in doing so discerned a second door, one which looked as heavy as the first. It was not locked either and she drew it open the few inches necessary for her to get a glimpse into what lay beyond.

What lay beyond was a cavernous space strewn with wooden crates and large objects concealed under wraps of canvas and cloth. But there was no question what was in those crates or under those swatches of canvas and cloth. Some of the arms were out in the open: a 20 mm cannon, a couple of machine-guns, four squat mortars, a small arsenal of M1 carbines, and four handheld Redeye missiles.

So vast was this warehouse that Ellie initially did not see the men who were gathered at the other end of it. A couple were in Western business suits, looking for all the world like middle-aged accountants, others were in camouflage uniforms and sported pinstriped keffiyahs on their heads. Except for the men in the business suits, they all carried arms. To Ellie that seemed a bit like bringing coals to Newcastle.

They were talking loudly and very fast and in at least two, possibly three different languages. Ellie assumed they were bargaining over the price of weapons, but she was so far away that she could not be sure. She wanted to tape the discussion and seeing that there was no one nearby, she risked edging the door open a bit further until she could squeeze herself in. She crouched down and began crawling toward the men.

She had all the cover she could ask for, what with all the crates and canvas-draped howitzers and recoilless guns. Gradually, the voices became more distinct, and as Ellie had a fairly good background in French, most of what was being said was comprehensible to her.

“It seems to me, Mr. Cravitch, that you have not met our specifications,” one man said.

Ellie identified the voice as Kayyim’s.

The man he'd addressed as Cravitch—one of those in business suits—was unmoved. "I admit that we could not obtain all the Belgian FN MAG's you wanted, but we have seen to it that you have been amply compensated."

"Amply compensated? You have given us only one hundred AKM's . . ." a colleague of Kayyim's protested. "We ordered three hundred."

"But you have three hundred Chinese Type 66's for the same price," Cravitch countered.

"The 66's are imitation! Three of them aren't worth one AKM, you know that very well, Mr. Cravitch."

"Gentlemen, I have done the best I can with what is currently in stock. To make things a little more palatable I've thrown in two hundred and fifty RGD anti-personnel grenades. Three hundred grams each, thirty meter range, fifteen to twenty meter fragmentation radius. I am sure your Basque friends should find them useful."

"The arms are for Ulster," one of Kayyim's friends said sharply.

"Oh, yes, wrong shipping order. Yes, you're right. The IRA. Well, they'll blow up a British soldier every bit as well as a member of the Guardia Civil. These grenades make no fine distinctions, I've found."

"You have included the RDX?"

"The *plastique?* Of course, we run a tight ship here, much as you may question my competence on occasion. Just so you won't go away feeling angry, I will give you credit for the AKM's and if you'd like, you can take delivery of the additional two hundred in six days' time in San Salvador. My agent, Mr. Sayers, can be reached at the Sheraton. It is possible that I will be there myself."

"And what, may I ask, will you be doing in San Salvador?"

"I am surprised at you, Gamal. That is of no concern to you. I have other business transactions to conduct that have nothing to do with you."

"There is a war going on in El Salvador," one man remarked irrelevantly.

"There's a war going on here too. Without wars, I'd be out of business."

Ellie raised her eyes just above the top of the massive crate.

Cravitch thrust forward a sheaf of papers and indicated that Kayyim should put his signature on the relevant forms.

Kayyim's bodyguard, Achmed, growing bored with these negotiations, turned away from the others. By chance he caught sight of Ellie.

She'd lowered herself down almost instantaneously, and Achmed was not absolutely certain he'd seen anything: maybe just a shadow, a flickering movement, a rat scuttling among the crates in the gloom, nothing more.

But he decided that he would investigate. No one was paying any attention to him nor did he announce his suspicions. Ellie waited in the darkness, hoping that she had not been seen, but when she heard the approaching footsteps she realized her hope was forlorn.

Either she could stay where she was and pray that he overlooked her—which was possible given the sheer number of boxes and crates piled up in the area—or else she could crawl back toward the rear of the warehouse and try to leave the same way she had gotten in.

It made more sense to do the latter. On her hands and knees, she began to make her way down along the narrow paths formed by the merchandise on either side of her. She could only guess where she was headed; she thought she was getting further toward the rear, but because she could not stand erect and take her bearings, she had no way of being certain.

Achmed meanwhile did not venture too far; hearing nothing more to alarm him, he began to think he had been imagining things. He went to rejoin the others when there was a loud crash—what sounded like a great many clattering pans toppling to the floor, but was in fact, several M16's falling from an open box that had been suddenly jarred.

This time Achmed did not wonder whether he was deceived by his imagination. Everyone else in the warehouse turned toward the sound. Without exchanging a word, they took hold of their handguns and proceeded to fan out in expectation that sooner or later they would apprehend the intruder by boxing him—or her—in.

Only Cravitch and Sayers remained where they were, certain that their business partners would deal in an appropriate manner with the spy. Cravitch said to Sayers, "We had better put someone on the back door next time. Our security is getting too lax." But his quiet well-modulated voice betrayed not the slightest hint of any anxiety on his part.

Ellie knew that she was in trouble and that there was nothing to be gained by this tedious crawl through a maze composed of arms. She still had not been seen and though this was a temporary advantage, she capitalized on it by picking herself up off the floor and running. Only when she was on her feet again did she see that all this time she had been progressing in the wrong direction. She was further from the back of the warehouse than she was before.

They would hear her running, she knew. There were too many of

them, and to get from where she was to the exit—assuming they hadn't already blocked it—was next to impossible.

At one point, she had to break out into the open. As she did so, a man spotted her and fired. His shot missed and punctured one of the crates, causing Cravitch to cry out, "Careful, please, gentlemen! Don't damage any of the merchandise. Otherwise, I will have to charge you."

No one seemed to pay heed to his admonition and it appeared that in this case price was no object.

Harry was still contemplating his strategy when he heard the gunshot. It sounded much louder than it would have under ordinary circumstances with so much space inside the warehouse to amplify it.

Harry had no way of knowing what was going on inside, but that was of secondary importance. He had the diversion he needed, however it had come about.

The lone guard in front of the warehouse had heard the gunshot and, thinking that his assistance might be needed, opened the door and went in.

He was astonished to find someone coming up from behind him. But before he could turn to see who it was, Harry brought down the stock of the .38 hard against the back of his head. Not hard enough though. The guard staggered, groaning, but was only stunned. Again, Harry smashed the butt end of the .38 down. This time the guard dropped, his eyes rolling as he did so.

Having never been inside this place, and without knowing what to expect, Harry flattened himself next to the prostrate man he'd just knocked senseless. But not before he was observed by two astonished men in ties and jackets.

"Over here, Gamal!" one of them yelled before vanishing behind a wall of crates. He was followed to safety within moments by his companion.

Harry held his fire, trying to get a fix on the situation. Then he beheld Achmed, his old friend. That was all the fix on the situation he needed.

A man was waiting for Ellie. He wore a kefiiyah, brandished a Baretta, and knew exactly where she would emerge from among the boxes. She rushed right into his outstretched arms. She found herself trapped; she squirmed and fought against him, but he had a solid grip on her, and

the tip of the gun stuck in the crook of her back. Actually, he seemed to be enjoying the experience for he had really not expected such a pretty woman, and like a lover, he hugged her closer, so much so that she emitted a cry of pain, soon muffled by the press of the gun against her flesh; it felt as though he were trying to stab her with the muzzle.

To his friends, he shouted something in Arabic, signaling them that he had caught the intruder and that there was nothing more to fear. He had no way of knowing there was another intruder in the front of the warehouse. He brought Ellie out into the center of the warehouse for all to see his catch, laughing with great amusement. His laugh stopped when he saw Achmed.

Achmed obviously had not expected to see Harry again. He raised his gun and sighted it as though this alone would convince him to surrender. It didn't. Achmed called to Kayyam, who had not yet appeared, probably soliciting his opinion as to what course of action he should take. He kept his gun trained on Harry while Harry kept his gun on Achmed.

Just then Kayyim came into view and Achmed allowed his attention to wander. Harry fired his .38. Achmed leapt into the air and came down in an awkward heap, barely alive. His gun blazed but it seemed that he wasn't really aiming it anywhere in particular.

The others wisely took refuge behind the crates just as Cravitch and Sayers had earlier.

Harry rolled over to his left, firing simultaneously, this time taking Achmed out of commission altogether. Like a prayerful supplicant, he extended his arms, then flopped over and did not move.

So as to avoid being pinned down, Harry bounded across the floor, performing elaborate choreography as he sought to elude the barrage of bullets directed against him.

Finding cover at last, he realized that he had now managed to equalize the conflict to an extent; for while he was outnumbered, there was no way that Kayyim or his allies could get to him without revealing themselves in the process.

As soon as he glanced around he saw that he had chosen a fortuitous spot in which to seek protection. Immediately to his left, was a half-open box stencilled with Cyrillic letters and a series of numbers, attesting to its Soviet origin. Inside were grenades—RDG-5 anti-personnel fragmentation grenades to be precise.

This should make things more equal, he reasoned, taking one in his hand, pulling the pin from it, and lobbing it toward the other side of the warehouse, just beyond the first row of crates where he judged his

enemies to be hiding.

In response there was a savage, useless burst of gunfire, but the grenade continued to sail through the air, arching down behind the crates. A moment passed, then the entire universe seemed to explode as the detonation touched off live ammunition; it sounded something like Chinese New Year's celebrations on Grand Avenue, only much, much louder. Everything was going up, sizzling for a second, then erupting in a convulsive roar that was accompanied by a brilliant display of fire.

Harry knew he had better get out of this place before the fire spread to something sufficiently volatile to blow the entire warehouse and all its illegal contents sky high.

He was not alone in this idea. No longer concerned about Harry, Kayyim's party came running out, screaming in panic. One of them lurched a few steps, then collapsed, as flames lapped at his back. What happened to the two men in business suits Harry could not say, nor did he care for all this attention directed to Ellie.

Where she had come from, what she was doing here, was a complete mystery to him. But there was no mistaking her. A man in a keffiyah was dragging her to safety though if one was to judge by the gun he held to her head, safety of only a relative nature.

Harry darted out in hope of intercepting them. The flames were gathering force, leaping into the air with a great fierce crackling, singeing Harry's hair, his eyebrows, diminishing visibility at the same time, with the warehouse rapidly becoming engulfed in smoke.

Ellie and her captor were moving too quickly for Harry to be able to accurately aim. The smoke protected him from view, which was all well and good, but it obscured his target at the same time.

He scrambled after them. Sirens shrieked in the distance. Harry had no idea what he would discover upon emerging from the warehouse, but precedent seemed to dictate that he would find a small army. Small armies in Beirut generally had the habit of shooting at him, Harry noted. And they didn't always need to have a good reason to do so.

For a couple of minutes, he lost sight of Ellie, he lost sight of just about everyone. All he could make out were shadowy figures in the smoke and the harsh luminous light from the flames. Ammunition was still detonating with decisive pops, but so far the most combustible elements had not gone off yet. If they ever did, there'd be no doubt about the result.

At last, Harry managed to escape the warehouse. In spite of the

firemen who were beginning to mobilize their hoses, he recognized that the danger had scarcely passed, not with the ever increasing likelihood that the whole warehouse would go, probably taking the neighborhood, such as it was, with it.

In all the confusion, no one remarked on Harry or threatened him as he tore through the crowd of onlookers, searching for Ellie.

Then he saw a flash of her white dress. He raced down to where the two limousines had been parked, but found only one when he got there; the other must have pulled away. He couldn't tell who was in the second limo; he couldn't see through the smoked glass windows.

He realized the futility of trying to shoot his way into the remaining car. Having ridden in a similar model, he was well aware of how resistant it was, particularly to a .38, much less a Makarov.

The limo began to move, but it did not go far. Evidently, the driver was waiting for someone. Half a minute elapsed before the straggler came into view, fighting the crowd to get to the car.

Here was an opportunity of sorts, Harry thought, watching his progress. Of course, if Ellie had been taken away in the first limo, it was no opportunity at all—except, as always, just another opportunity to die.

The man approaching the limo was vaguely recognizable to Harry; he was one of Kayyim's henchmen who yesterday had escorted him to the basement. In his hand, he was carrying two AKM's he'd probably pilfered from the burning warehouse.

As soon as the rear door of the limo swung open to admit him, Harry peered in and saw Ellie, squeezed between two men, neither of whom was Kayyim. She was not bound from the looks of it, but she appeared partially immobilized with terror. Harry hoped that she would not freeze at the last minute, because that would only make rescuing her much more difficult.

Now he moved in between the commando and the vehicle; in one hand he held the .38, in the other the Makarov.

The commando was within a few feet of the car when he saw that his path had been blocked and for a moment he didn't seem to know what to make of this development. Because he had his hands full with the Soviet weapons he'd stolen, he couldn't react quickly or decisively enough.

One of the men in the car sensed the danger and reached out to shut the door. But Harry, anticipating him, slammed the barrel of the Soviet handgun down on his arm so that he lost his grip on the handle.

Ellie, far from being paralyzed, was quite aware of what was happening, and rather than wait, sprang from the seat and hurtled herself across the lap of the man to her left. Because he was concentrating his attention entirely on Harry, he did not know what she was doing until she was halfway out of the car. Then he grabbed hold of her and attempted to pull her back.

At that point, the commando Harry was keeping at bay made a sudden advance, swinging one of the AKM's, having no space in which to fire it. Harry saw it coming out of the corner of his eye and lowered his head just in time to avoid the brunt of the gun against his skull. At the same time, Harry fired both his guns, and though he was in an extremely awkward stance, his aim did not suffer.

The commando reeled back under the impact of two chest wounds. At least one of the bullets had penetrated a lung because when he attempted to yell, blood rushed up his throat and bubbled over his lips.

Ellie, meanwhile, was still struggling against her captor who might very well have shot her except that he could not get his hand free to do so. Nor could his companion do it for him, not unless he was willing to risk hitting the wrong person in such close quarters.

Harry seized hold of the man's left hand, prying it away from Ellie's wrist, while snapping two fingers back, breaking the bones. The man shrieked and immediately let go. Ellie sort of fell out of the car just as the man sitting on the right fired.

He had begun by trying to hit Ellie, but had reconsidered and raised his weapon in hope of felling Harry instead. This indecisiveness cost him. His bullet burned a sliver of flesh off Harry's arm, causing enough pain for him to drop the .38, but his grip on the Makarov did not falter and he discharged it. This was just the type of situation the Makarov was designed for; the range was perfect. The man groaned like an old man with severe arthritis who cannot quite get his body to do what he would like it to. He jerked up, clutching his throat, then slumped back. A jet of blood shot out of the wound and clouded the window on his side, and flew all over his friend who was examining his broken, swelling fingers with horror.

There was one other occupant of the car—the driver—and until now he had remained hunkered down behind the bulletproof partition. But as Harry moved to help Ellie up, he opened his door, dropped to the ground and opened fire.

But in attempting to do too much simultaneously, he did not succeed in hitting either of his intended victims. There was one round left in the Makarov. It found a new home in the driver's head.

Harry helped himself to the driver's weapon. To his astonishment and delight, he found that it was his .44 Magnum. Evidently, the driver had come into possession of it after it had been confiscated. Harry was grateful that he'd not been shot to death with his own weapon; that, literally, would have been adding insult to injury.

"This is getting to be habit forming," Ellie remarked as she observed the tumult around them. She was shaken, but still in command of herself. "I am beginning to think all this excitement is getting to be a little too much, Inspector Callahan."

"Harry, just call me Harry, would you?"

She gave him a faint smile. "All right, Harry, what do we do now?"

"Get the hell out of here before that goddam warehouse blows."

The warehouse though was impatient to leave the planet; suddenly the earth shook and there was an explosion so powerful that it probably could have been heard as far away as Damascus or Tel Aviv. The sky turned scarlet with the flames that shot up and the air filled with mangled bodies and twisted debris and when gravity asserted itself, the bodies and the debris came dropping down all over the city. It was a rainstorm of the dead.

Disheveled, and drained, and looking more wretched than some of the white-faced figures that lay strewn about them, Harry and Ellie managed to find a café in the European sector from which violence had taken a temporary vacation. Elderly men and chic young women with enviable tans regarded Harry and his companion with obvious dismay; their torn and soiled clothes, their bruised and bleeding flesh, reminded them of what they had come to this place to get away from.

Harry was too wasted to concern himself with the sensibilities of these wealthy Lebanese and European expatriates who wished the war would go away but were helpless to make it do so.

"I need a drink," said Ellie. "I am not particular. But it should be a very tall drink and very, very strong."

"I think I will have one of the same. And while we drink ourselves under the table maybe you'll tell me what the hell you were doing there—"

"In Mr. Cravitch's warehouse?"

"Mr. Who?"

"I would have thought you'd known. Well, dear, listen carefully and you will discover why you're going to be at the Sheraton Hotel in San Salvador this coming Sunday."

CHAPTER

Twelve

It was a bad connection and the Small Man was having a hell of a time trying to make himself understood to his unit commander nearly ten thousand miles away. He kept having to shout and still worse, hear the sad lonely reverberation of his own voice come back to him.

"I lost the subject," he kept repeating with growing insistence.

Gradually, the unit commander seemed to comprehend him. "How did that happen?"

"She was always on the move. She left one room, took another, then I never saw her again until the airport."

"What did you say?"

"I said, I never saw her until the airport. I was watching the airport for three days. She was with the detective."

"The who?"

"The detective."

There was a shrill whine that came through the wires, and if one listened attentively one could catch fragments of any number of multilingual conversations.

"Where did they go?"

"I don't know. The plane was bound for Cyprus. After that, it's anyone's guess."

"And why didn't you follow them?"

"I attempted to. But there were complications."

There was only one complication actually; he had neglected to remove his gun and was halted at airport security. He was not arrested for if they arrested everyone with guns the jails in Beirut would be overflowing and the streets completely empty. But he was prohibited from boarding the Cyprus flight, and could only watch helplessly as it took off.

"Complications!" The unit commander's anger registered even on a very bad connection. "Well, there is nothing else you can do there. Come back to San Francisco. Sooner or later the subject will return. Perhaps she is on her way back now."

The Small Man was unhappy with his failure, and he expected that he would be rebuked and possibly purged upon his return. But still he was efficient at what he did, and he resolved that should he ever catch up to Ellie Winston again he would see that she had no opportunity to elude him a second time.

There were a good many reasons not to come to El Salvador and almost none to do so. First and foremost, the man that Harry had been pursuing halfway around the world and back again—Gamal Abd'el Kayyim—might not turn up there. That depended primarily on whether the man with the guns turned up. But Mr. Cravitch might not have survived the blaze that consumed his warehouse, or if he had, his business might not have survived. There was no telling how many millions he'd lost in the fire. But on the other hand, Harry had learned he possessed similar warehouses in various parts of the world, and one or two setbacks could probably be tolerated without fear of bankruptcy.

So already, Harry was contending with uncertainties which cast into doubt prospects for success in Central America.

The U.S. Embassy in Beirut had been cooperative—but only to a point. The proper papers were provided him, he was allowed on the plane without undergoing a security check, and all the necessary tickets were arranged for.

He was warned by the Embassy's CIA station chief that he was to do nothing—absolutely nothing—in El Salvador until he was contacted by agency operatives there, a condition that Harry had no choice but to agree to if he was to get out of Beirut.

Ellie was in a state of conflict. In one week she had witnessed more violence than she had ever wanted to see in her entire life. So in one sense, she was ready to go home to the security of the KCVO news anchor desk. But that would mean sacrificing the story she had gone to such desperate lengths to obtain. She had come this far; why not go all the way? In the end, she decided as Harry suspected she would, and declared her intention to accompany him to El Salvador.

Like her exasperated boss back in San Francisco, Harry knew better than to object. She had amply demonstrated her persistence and her courage; to argue with her was as mad as—well, as mad as going to El Salvador in the middle of a war.

On this occasion, however, Ellie said that she would be content just to stay in the hotel and not venture out on the streets.

But since they were registering as Mr. and Mrs. Harry Grave—the

name not chosen arbitrarily—in the same hotel where Mr. Cravitch and Kayyim were expected to show up, this did not necessarily guarantee her safety. Harry reminded her of this. She just said, “I’ll be a good girl and get a lot of reading done.”

Harry didn’t know how seriously to take her—in terms of this remark or anything else.

They arrived in El Salvador on a sizzling tropical night. The shooting didn’t sound quite as bad as it had in Beirut, but that undoubtedly made no difference to the victims whose bodies would turn up in all sorts of unlikely places once the sun came up. Some of the residents of the capital continually complained about the corpses, often mutilated and riddled with gunshot wounds, that they would have to step over to get out of their houses each morning. This was not the kind of thing to inspire a great deal of tourism.

Just as it had been in Beirut, one never quite knew who one’s enemies were. They might be from the left, but the likelihood was that they were from the right. Often they were members of the nation’s security forces who cloaked themselves in the anonymity of sinister death squads. A banker, a schoolteacher, a minister, a youngster, a young bride: no matter how innocent one might be, if one rubbed somebody the wrong way or happened to keep the wrong company or turn up at the wrong place at a very wrong time, he too might end up on somebody’s doorstep in the morning.

“A couple of Americans down here to advise on land distribution were shot to death in the restaurant in this hotel,” Harry told Ellie. “Somebody walked in, blew them away.” He did not wish so much to frighten her—she might have recalled the story on her own in any case—but he did want her to be more aware of the risks than she’d been in Lebanon.

“I think,” she said after a few moments of hesitation, “I think that I’ll have my meals sent up to me.”

Their room was nicely kept; the maids, squat, dark Indian women with sorrowful eyes, did not stop coming just because of the war. The rates were cheap, too, since it was obviously a buyer’s market.

Harry noticed right off that the bed was a double and not a twin. “I’ll have to call down and see if they can change it,” he said and was about to do so when Ellie stopped him.

“I see no reason to bother them. I think it’s fine the way it is.”

Harry didn’t put the phone down; instead he dialed Room Service. He was rather surprised when someone picked it up. He had begun to wonder whether anything worked in this country except for a

relentless killing machine that had claimed in excess of twenty thousand lives.

"I'd like a bottle of your best champagne," he said. "I don't care what the cost is." Turning to Ellie, he added, "Especially since the U.S. Government is footing the bill for it."

By the time the champagne arrived, conveyed by a mestizo who looked like he'd be deft with a machete, Ellie had changed into something she judged appropriate for a sweltering night in San Salvador. Unlike Harry, who would have chosen a bullet-proof vest as part of his stay-at-home wardrobe, she had elected to wear a cream-colored gown that was slit up both sides. She had only to stand in front of the lamp for the gown to become fully transparent, an effect that she sensed Harry might appreciate for she very rarely moved away from the light.

"You should wear that when you do the nightly news," remarked Harry. "I'm sure your ratings would go through the roof."

He began to work the corkscrew, the only thing keeping them from a vintage bottle of Taitinger. There was a loud pop. But it wasn't from the champagne. Harry went to the window and looked out. There was another pop. That wasn't from the champagne either; that was from some joker who was either setting off firecrackers or setting off explosives. Harry guessed that it would have to be the latter. To Ellie he said, "Make sure you don't stand too close to the window."

The next popping noise was a more innocent one. Champagne frothed over the neck of the bottle. The only problem was what toast they should make.

"To a long life," Ellie said.

A rapid burst of machine-gun fire echoed down in the street, mocking her declaration. Then there was a loud scream, the type of scream that could send chills down one's back, then silence.

"To any life at all," Harry said, clinking glasses.

She was suddenly afraid or rather the fear that she'd suppressed up until now was coming to the surface. Her hand was shaking. It was hard for her to keep the glass steady in her hand. She stepped over to Harry and threw her arms around him and nestled her head against his chest. For a moment, he held her tightly, feeling the warmth of her skin against the light fabric of the gown. But it was only for a moment.

Somebody was rapping on the door.

Ellie broke away from him. He, in turn, reached for his gun although he did not believe that they faced any danger. Would a

terrorist or a member of a death squad bother to knock?

Still, he was careful about the way he opened the door.

In sauntered Jake Brady, accompanied by a man in a rumpled suit who looked as shady as anyone Harry had ever seen in an old Howard Hawks movie he'd caught on late night T.V. Both of them carried briefcases which made them seem important, not a particularly wise image to present in El Salvador. Important people were occupying a great many important graves these days.

Brady glanced around the room, Ellie had discreetly taken refuge in the bathroom; the only way Brady would have to register her presence was through his nose; her perfume hung heavily in the air. He refrained from making any comments.

Instead, he took a seat and so did his friend. Seeing the glass of champagne Ellie had discarded, he picked it up, sipped at it, pronounced it of reasonably good quality. Then he said, "Why are you here, Callahan?"

"I thought I explained that to your station chief in Beirut. I assumed he passed along the information."

"He did, but I want to hear it in your own words,"

So, wearily, Harry related to him why he was here, that he expected Kayyim and Cravitch and that it seemed to him by removing these two men, he would be doing a great deal to thwart an international terrorist network. "That's what you wanted me to do, if I remember our conversation a couple of weeks ago in San Francisco."

Brady owned that this was so. He said, "I don't care what happens to Kayyim. If you can dispose of him without the American government being linked to it, all well and good. The problem is with Russell."

"Russell?"

"Russell Cravitch. We don't want him touched."

"You are aware of the fact that he's been arming the Libyans, the PLO, the Basque separatists, the Provisional IRA, the Baader-Meinhof Gang, and the Red Bridages, among others, for several years?"

"I have no comment on that. My instructions from Washington are explicit. Kayyim is one thing, but Cravitch is quite another kettle of fish. If you so much as take him in for interrogation, you will be in deep trouble. I cannot be responsible then for what would happen to you."

Harry knew a threat when he heard one. "The *plastique* used to blow up San Francisco Airport—that came from Cravitch's warehouse in

Beirut. The Alpha Group acquires arms from Cravitch, courtesy of Kayyim's funding. Now you tell me he's not to be touched. Is he supposed to go on providing arms to these people or is this a part of another investigation I know nothing about?"

Brady didn't like these questions nor the fact that it was Harry asking them. "Actually, I think it would be preferable if you returned home. Tomorrow morning there's a plane leaving for Miami, I want you and your friend—" he nodded toward the bathroom and continued, "I want her to be with you. You've helped us enormously, the agency is grateful to you, but your presence in San Salvador can only make things much more difficult for us."

"You change your mind very quickly."

"I was sent here to evaluate you and now that I've made that evaluation, there's nothing more to discuss. You are, frankly, not reliable enough for our purposes."

Then Harry realized why Cravitch would remain immune from prosecution or disposal: he was supplying arms to the other side as well, to elements supported by the U.S. government. He had heard rumors that Cravitch had once been with the agency, and there were those who insisted he still was. It wouldn't surprise him to learn that Cravitch and Brady had once been colleagues, perhaps even friends. He knew very well Brady would deny such a connection. He was a man well-trained to lie; it was his business, after all.

Instead, Harry said, "I'll be on that plane tomorrow."

Brady seemed astonished that he should give in so easily.

"It's at 10:40. There'll be a taxi waiting for you and Miss Winston—or is it Mrs. Grave?—an hour before. I wouldn't want you to be late."

The two agents let themselves out.

Only then did Ellie emerge. "I heard what they said. "Are you actually planning on leaving here?"

"Oh, yes, for a couple of hours. We will go to the airport like they want us to, but we won't be on the plane when it leaves. That is, I won't be. You have the choice."

"I've made it," she said, giving Harry a lingering kiss. "Now let's see if we can't resume where we left off a little while ago."

It was the best proposition that Harry had heard in some time.

The unidentified man who'd barged in with Brady the night before had evidently been assigned the task of following Ellie and Harry and making sure they got off to Miami as they were supposed to. Harry

noticed that he still had on his rumpled suit.

Certainly, he would have little reason to doubt that they had any other intention aside from complying with Brady's edict; they were both lugging suitcases and tote bags. How was he to know that they were empty?

Harry hadn't quite figured out how he was to deceive the tail, but he was sure he could devise some plan.

The airport was crowded with throngs of Salvadorian citizens, mostly those with money, who were happy to get out of the country. Great numbers of relatives congregated in the waiting areas, hoping to see their loved ones off.

Harry allowed their tail to observe them at the airline desk where they were provided tickets, courtesy of the U.S. Government, and directed to the departure gate. He made sure they were seen checking in their luggage and undergoing the usual customs formalities. They even joined the other passengers filing through the departure gate.

But they never got on the plane. The man in the rumpled suit watched it soar into the sky, satisfied that his mission was completed; he never realized that Harry and Ellie hadn't left the airport.

Another plane landed only ten minutes after the flight to Miami had taken off. Harry was just about to hire a taxi back into town when the passengers debarking from it began to stream into the terminal.

One of the men was instantly recognizable. One gets familiar with someone after chasing him around half the globe. It was Kayyim. Inevitably, he was flanked by bodyguards.

He was taking no chances this time.

"Our friend showed up," he whispered to Ellie.

She quickly looked back, then stepped into the shadows again.

The Libyan minister was too preoccupied to have taken note of them.

They found a taxi but rather than taking it immediately back to the capital, they waited until they could see where Kayyim was headed.

As it happened, Kayyim did not go to the Sheraton, but instead chose a route that took him into a district of San Salvador called San Benito, an obviously prosperous suburb situated on a slope of a dormant volcano.

Maybe, Harry thought, there had been a change in plans. Whatever the case, Kayyim's destination turned out to be a white stucco villa situated behind high walls adorned with barbed wire. Men with automatics and German shepherds patrolled the perimeter.

Somebody of great significance lives here, Harry decided.

He had kept his eyes so riveted on the Lincoln carrying Kayyim just up ahead of him that he failed to see what was happening behind him.

Ellie did, however. She nudged Harry who turned around and saw three armed motorcyclists racing after them. Their faces were hidden by reflecting glasses; otherwise they were all in black leather ornamented by silver epaulets.

Harry tried to get the driver to speed up. He was reluctant to take any action; his hands were frozen on the wheel and his eyes were filled with terror.

The road they were on wound up to the gate of the compound. Another quarter of a mile and the limousine would be through it and Kayyim would be lost to him again. Already the security guards were in the process of opening the gate to admit the Lincoln.

The motorcyclists were meanwhile gaining on them from behind.

“Get ready for a bumpy ride,” Harry warned Ellie. Then he vaulted over the seat and, using his Magnum as a means of persuasion, forced the driver to surrender the wheel to him.

CHAPTER

Thirteen

The taxi was a delapidated vehicle of mid-Fifties vintage and it didn't want to do more than forty miles an hour, but Harry flattened his foot on the gas pedal and managed to get it close to sixty though the entire chassis rattled in response, threatening to burst.

"You were right about the bumpy part," Ellie muttered, trying desperately to keep from being thrown off her seat.

"Keep down, Ellie, in case they fire."

And the cyclists were now close enough to hit their targets.

The Lincoln was accelerating, rapidly bridging the distance that separated it from the compound.

"Hold tight!" Harry urged, then veered the taxi off the road, onto a dirt shoulder, only to take it back on when he'd come abreast of the Lincoln, crashing into its right rear fender with such force that the Lincoln itself was propelled partway off the road.

Again Harry launched the taxi as though it were a missile, hurtling into the Lincoln again, but with even more power than before so that this time he succeeded in melding the two cars together. As a result, when the Lincoln moved it took the taxi with it. And vice versa.

The wretched taxi driver was down on the floor, cowering and praying in growing desperation to the Madonna. Ellie too was on the floor, having been jarred from her seat by the successive crashes. She decided that all things considered it was better to stay there.

At the same time, the three motorcyclists had begun to slow, Harry caught a glimpse of them in the rearview mirror which was all that he required. Abruptly, he put the taxi into reverse and since the road was steeply graded, he had the advantage of having gravity on his side.

The taxi lurched backwards, so did the Lincoln it had become entangled with.

Too late, the motorcyclists realized what Harry was doing. Having no chance to maneuver themselves backwards in time, they had only one choice: to jump.

Only one of the cyclists managed to do this in time. The other two were sent catapulting into the air as the Lincoln-towing taxi barreled

into their bikes. The first landed on his head and lay still with blood seeping slowly out of his helmet, the second broke both his legs and his left arm in his descent. Even the third, who had jumped, was stunned and in no condition to pose any resistance.

But the security men from the compound had come running, with their huge dogs snarling ahead of them. The Lincoln's tires were churning but it wasn't moving anywhere. One of its doors opened and a man emerged from it. Blood was on his forehead, apparently he'd injured himself in the crash. He was armed only with a handgun which he sighted on the crumbling taxi window and fired.

The windshield, never very sturdy, collapsed at once. Glass covered the entire interior of the battered vehicle, causing the driver to wail fervently in protest.

Harry was crouched down low so he avoided any injury from the bullet, if not from the flying glass. Opening the door on his side, he leaned out and fired back.

He did not wait to see if he had hit the man he was aiming at for he speedily ducked back into the taxi, but he was rewarded by a prolonged scream that would seem to intimate some success. When he looked up, he saw the guard slumped over the Lincoln's hood, his bloodless face reflected in its highly polished surface.

Six guards, composing the security detail for the compound, took up position now and opened fire simultaneously. The barrage was heavy and continued for well over a minute without accomplishing very much except to disable the taxi.

Still Harry wasn't particularly concerned. The taxi didn't actually have to work, it just had to go downhill. Releasing the handbreak, he began maneuvering the taxi backwards. Naturally, the Lincoln was dragged right along with it.

The security force ceased firing. Their target was receding too fast for them to have any hope of stopping it. Instead, with a great deal of shouting, they scrambled after the taxi.

Those in the Lincoln were very much aware of their predicament. All they had to do was look down and they would see a precipitous drop on one side and a narrow circling road on the other. If on the other hand, they looked directly in back of them they would see a bullet-riddled windowless taxi, but no driver, Harry was steering blindly and keeping out of sight but there was no way for those in Kayyim's party to know this. There was every possibility that Harry was dead, that the taxi was moving downhill out of control, and that if they didn't take action soon they would be dead as well.

So one by one they leapt out of the moving Lincoln, but because its speed was approaching forty miles per hour this was not an easy stunt to execute. Broken limbs were the rule. One man sustained a broken neck.

The security men were up at the crest of the hill, still shouting, but more hoarsely now. It would take them another few minutes before they could get in any position to use their weapons.

Praying silently that the brakes still functioned, Harry abruptly applied them. The taxi's two good tires screeched, but gradually the vehicle slowed and came to a halt. The Lincoln tottered precariously over the slope. It was difficult to say where exactly the balancing point was, but Harry advised abandoning the taxi. Ellie concurred wholeheartedly, in spite of the danger that awaited them once they were exposed.

She slipped out the rear first. The Lincoln dipped, the taxi sagged in turn. The balance was perceptibly shifting from the light-weight taxi to the much heavier limousine.

The driver was still prostrate on the floor, scratched and bleeding from the glass, but more immobilized by fear than by pain. So Harry pushed him out, then jumped himself just as the Lincoln plummeted off the slope, carrying with it the taxi. There was a greater clatter of metal and glass, punctuated by an explosion that sent fire and smoke up into the still morning air of San Salvador.

"You all right?" Harry called to Ellie.

She was trying to figure that out. "I guess so."

They found themselves among a grove of palms and bougainvillea, which exuded a fragrant scent; everywhere there were bugs and mosquitoes, anxious to inspect the visitors who'd dropped in on them so suddenly.

The driver, still moaning, was beginning to crawl away, desperate to escape his tormenters.

Above them, on the road, five or six men lay sprawled out in a variety of contortions. They were struggling to recover from their jump, but they were too incapacitated by their injuries to simply pick themselves up and go on their way.

"I want you to get off this hill, Ellie, and I'll meet you back at the Sheraton, in the lobby. You just wait for me."

This time she did not balk. Having endured so much killing, she was in no mood for more. She gave him a brief kiss for luck and vanished into the underbrush.

By this point, the security men had reached this part of the road and

it was with considerable dismay that they regarded the scene that greeted them. They divided themselves up; three of the men went to the aid of the injured while their companions fanned out in search of Harry.

Harry ventured farther up the road, keeping behind the palms as he did so, to avoid being spotted.

It was then that he caught a glimpse of Kayyim. The Libyan minister had evidently suffered either a badly twisted or broken ankle. He was hobbling about with a grimace of pain etched onto his face. Nonetheless, he seemed determined to maintain command of the situation, barking orders and waving his gun as though he expected Harry to appear so that he could shoot him without further ado.

Since the grove of palms was really the only place along the road that a man could conceal himself, this was where the security men elected to undertake their search.

Any movement through the grass was likely to be heard; there was little chance of escape, but escape was not Harry's principal objective. He had not gone to so much trouble to give up on Kayyim now.

One of the security men betrayed his presence. His footsteps caused the undergrowth to rustle noisily, but Harry couldn't very well turn around and look at him, not without giving himself away.

The guard, an M16 in his hands, stepped around to the other side of the palm, and now Harry saw him. He raised his .44 at the precise moment that the guard realized he was there and brought his own weapon up to fire. But the .44 took him out before he could press the trigger. The roar of the gun naturally alerted the others. There was nothing to do now but fight.

Harry raced to the edge of the road, where he could see clearly and still have a minimum of cover. He spotted one security man rushing him from the right, leading him to believe the other was attempting to go around through the palm trees. He carefully sighted the man he had in view and fired. The guard hurtled backwards, but two others appeared to take his place. And Harry was certain that yet another was making his way surreptitiously toward him on the right.

A military truck of some sort had come into view; well, he should have suspected there'd be reinforcements sooner or later. Replacing his clip, he took aim and fired again. He might have hit one onrushing guard, he wasn't sure, but the second took a round in his stomach and crashed screaming into a flower-laden bush.

Inches above his head, a hole appeared in a palm tree, then another. Harry rolled in the opposite direction, firing without being sure of

where his antagonist was. From the other direction, there was a flurry of shots that screamed into the bush around him.

Then he saw a shadow, something olive, at any rate a shade of green that did not belong to the natural surroundings, and this was all that Harry had and so he used it as his target. The olive shade disappeared with a shriek.

Harry turned to concentrate on those still rushing him. What he saw heartened him. There were four men, firing as they moved, but they were displaying more caution than their late comrades, keeping low so that their advance vaguely resembled a clumsy duck walk.

There was one man who could not keep low enough, and that was Kayyim. His ankle was too painful. So he kept, more or less, erect, firing like the others, though it wasn't apparent that he could actually see Harry.

But Harry could see him. He stopped his firing which confounded his opponents. They did not know whether they'd hit him or not. When no additional resistance was forthcoming, Kayyim and the surviving security guards were emboldened enough to see whether they had in fact killed him.

It was then that Harry fired, wondering how these men had lived so long if they were this careless. Two guards went down instantly, a third dropped to the ground to safety. Kayyim attempted to follow the latter's example, but he couldn't manage to do it quickly enough because of his ankle, and when Harry discharged his Magnum a third time, the round took him in the thigh, forcing him down regardless. Kayyim's face had gone very pale and on it was a look of stunned disbelief that such a thing could have happened to him.

He still held onto his gun which he attempted to aim even as he hoisted himself up from the dust. His shot came nowhere close to Harry. When the Magnum went off again, he was slapped back down, with his chest opened up and spewing blood onto the roadbed.

For some moments, he tried groping his way up the hill as though this might help him. His fingernails—always so clean and well-manicured—filled with dirt as he did so. He clawed at the ground. Then he gave a deep rasping sound and expired.

By then, Harry was well on his way down the slope. His San Salvador adventure was at an end. But he wasn't through; he may have stopped Kayyim, but Cravitch was still at large.

For all he knew, Cravitch might be sequestered inside the compound. Maybe he'd been watching the show from the safety of the parapets, enjoying the spectacle with little more anxiety about the fate

of the participants than a theatregoer has for those who perform for him on stage. But his time was coming.

CHAPTER

Fourteen

Because Ellie had family in Miami, or said she did, she told Harry that she would make a stopover there rather than continuing straight on to San Francisco with him. She needed the rest, she said, and Harry did not doubt it. He needed the rest too.

Before they separated, she'd assured him that she cared deeply for him, though she did not use the word love, which was too full of traps. She'd added that she was thinking of breaking off with David Whittier who might have decided the same since he had left San Francisco some weeks before—so claimed his sister—and had not been heard from since. The implication was that Harry might come to replace Whittier in her affections. Harry wasn't so certain that this was a very good idea, or even possible, and neither, he gathered, was Ellie.

At their parting, she was subdued and scarcely spoke a word; part of it was surely the exhaustion of the ordeal they'd undergone, singly and together, part of it was her preoccupation with the story she had researched almost at peril of her life. Part of it might have been Harry. It was extremely complicated and Harry returned to San Francisco in something of a funk.

His mood was hardly buoyed by the debriefing he was compelled to undergo either. The man doing the debriefing was Tim Connelly. No CIA presence, just FBI.

"You caused quite a stir while you were abroad, I hear," Connelly started. He did not sound the least bit displeased, however.

"The world is out one more Libyan," said Harry.

"So I understand. And believe me, we are grateful for your services. We never expected you would go so far not accomplish so much, and in such a short span of time, I might add. I should imagine that it'll be difficult for you adjusting to the role of police detective again."

Harry conceded that it might at that, but he pointed out that it was unlikely to be boring, not with the continued terrorist threat to the city, which had prompted his far-flung investigation in the first place.

"Well, the threat hasn't ended, to be sure, but it has abated. Since you've gone, the agency, in coordination with your department, has

managed to make a number of substantial arrests that we believe are going to stick. As a result, there have been no recorded incidents that could possibly be linked to terrorism here in the last few weeks. And we are doing our best to insure that the trend holds."

"What about the Alpha Group? Have you found the people who killed Smith and Peterson?" He was referring to the two patrolmen shot to death on Route 101. "Or the people responsible for the airport blast?"

"Well, we have some suspects in custody, but I have to admit we haven't a solid case against them nor have we apprehended all the perpetrators. Still, we have made a big dent in Alpha's operation. It'll take some time for them to recover."

"What about Morgan, the clown who tried to kill Kayyim? You found out anything more about him?"

"It seems ironic that you accomplished what Morgan couldn't, doesn't it? But to answer your question it seems, the best we can make out, that he was a freelancer, possibly hired by the Alpha Group. Evidently some of the terrorists felt that Kayyim was giving too much to higher education and not enough to them. Anything else?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Good." Connelly appeared anxious to bring this debriefing to a close. "There is one more matter I have to take up with you. In recognition for your help to us, the Government would like to present you with a letter of commendation."

Having so rarely been commended for anything he'd done, Harry was naturally suspicious. He said, "I don't want a piece of paper. I want Cravitch."

"You want what?"

"Russell Cravitch, the *untouchable."*

Connelly was familiar with the name. "Yes, well Cravitch, as far as I know, is not in the United States at this time and is therefore not in the FBI's jurisdiction."

"But he is within the CIA's. They could find out where he is and stop him. It's just that they aren't much interested in doing so."

Connelly stood up to signal that their meeting was over.

"I am afraid that this is something you'll have to take up with Mr. Brady."

"I have talked with Mr. Brady."

Connelly smiled, rather patronizingly, Harry thought.

"Then there's nothing more I can suggest. I'm sorry."

"Bullshit," was Harry's judgment, but the FBI agent pretended not to hear him.

Two hours later, a little before two o'clock in the afternoon, the dispatcher reached Harry as he was approaching the corner of Webster and Post.

"Victor Two, Victor Two . . ."

"This is Victor Two."

"We have a report of a disturbance in the Telegraph Hill area. On the corner of Kearny. Three or four men, possibly armed, were seen entering a building housing TV Station KCVO."

"Repeat that."

The dispatcher did. It wasn't really necessary. Harry knew the building well.

Heavier traffic than usual delayed him and it took nearly half an hour to cross the city to Telegraph Hill. By that time, the disturbance that the dispatcher had initially referred to had turned into an event of far greater magnitude. All available units had been ordered into the area. Now black and whites, police vans, ambulances, and other assorted emergency vehicles cluttered the blocks in the immediate vicinity of the KCVO headquarters, lined up for blocks along Montgomery, Kearny, Filbert and Union. A cordon had been established on the Kearny and Filbert sides of the building.

As soon as Harry stepped out of his car, Captain Avery spotted him. Avery had not seen Harry in some time and remarked on the tan he'd acquired in the exotic locales he'd been in. "It would be nice to get away for a while," he said offhandedly.

Harry refrained from saying that what he'd taken was not necessarily a vacation; he was anxious to know what the situation was and he believed that Avery could tell him, if he ever got around to it.

Avery eventually did. "We have a feeling it's the remnants of the Alpha Group, the ones that escaped our dragnet. There may be as few as four or as many as six or seven, we don't know. Initial reports were sketchy. But about forty-five minutes ago they walked into the reception area on the first floor, suddenly produced their weapons, overcame the lone security man there, and have now seized one, possibly two, floors upstairs, including the newsroom. They've sealed themselves in with maybe twenty-five hostages or so. We've got one of the station managers down with us, he tells us there are between twenty and thirty people on duty at this time of day."

Harry noticed that there was a special Pacific Telephone & Telegraph van nearby. Technicians were attempting to establish communication directly into the building; several T.V. monitors were operating, but those tuned to KCVO displayed only the station logo with the message: Technical Difficulties/Please Stand By.

"It's been that way since 1:35 when the station went off the air. No announcement, nothing, just went off," said Avery.

"Have the terrorists made any demands yet?"

"Nothing, not a word from them. Nor does anyone answer the telephones, and we've got people calling them every couple of minutes. But there is one thing that might give us a lead."

"And what's that?"

"The station manager I mentioned to you says that at six o'clock this evening there was going to be a special news report on terrorism. It was listed in the program announcements in the papers and the *Chronicle* ran a story about it so that it was public knowledge. He feels the terrorist action might be related to the airing of the story."

Suddenly, Harry was overcome by fear. "Who's supposed to be doing the story tonight, do you know?"

Avery was puzzled by the change that had come over him, the urgency in his voice. "No, let me get you the station manager, he'll probably know."

The station manager turned out to be a short balding man with the air of someone whose nerves have been long since shot. Obviously, the forcible takeover of his station was not making his condition any better. He kept plugging cigarettes into his mouth and lighting them, often ignoring the fact that he'd already one going in the ashtray.

"Who's doing the six o'clock news?" Harry demanded. There was no time for the ordinary courtesies.

"This is Inspector Callahan," said Avery, figuring an introduction might be necessary. "And this is Joe Lewiston."

Lewiston shook his head. "Let's see if I remember. I'm on at night so I can't be absolutely sure." He proceeded to rattle off some names, none of which Harry recognized.

"What about Ellie Winston?"

"Oh yes, of course, she's the person responsible for the story. She's the one who gathered all the data, you know."

"I know very well."

"So she would be there."

“Would she be in the building now at two o’clock?”

Actually, Harry was astonished to learn that she was even in the city, much less the building, which was why he hadn’t been as alarmed when the radio call had gone out; he’d assumed that she was still in Miami with her family. He’d expected to hear from her when she got back. Well, the fact of the matter was that there hadn’t been any call, and she was back. Maybe she’d become so involved with her work that she hadn’t found time. But none of that was important now.

“Yes, I would think that she’d have some last minute editing to do so it’s pretty certain she’d be there at this hour of the afternoon. With a major story like she’s got, she’d be editing right up until the time she went on the air.”

He was about to explain further, but Harry had learned all that he needed from the man.

Outside of the phone company’s van, Harry spied Bressler. As always, he looked harassed, especially by members of the press who for weeks had been stalking him in hope of a new disclosure.

In his hands, he held a blueprint of the station. Several high ranking officers were clustered about him. One of them, Harry noted, was Connelly.

“You spoke too soon,” Harry told Connelly. “Whatever dent you made in Alpha wasn’t enough.”

Connelly nodded miserably, but said nothing.

Turning his attention to the blueprint, Harry listened as Bressler indicated all the points of ingress and egress in the building. He concluded a minimum of four men could adequately close off the top two floors and hold them so long as their ammunition lasted. “And of course,” he added, almost as an afterthought, “there are a great number of hostages whose lives would be jeopardized should we make any attempt to storm the area.”

He looked to Connelly for moral support. Connelly shrugged, saying, “The only thing we can do now is wait on the assumption that sooner or later they will make their demands known. Once they’ve done that, we can open negotiations for the release of the hostages. Until then . . .” He left the sentence hanging.

Choppers meantime were hovering over the ten-story building while police snipers took up positions on neighboring rooftops. There was an air of great expectancy throughout the sweltering summer afternoon, but to the frustration of all those waiting outside, nothing happened. On the T.V. monitors, the screen was still proclaiming the same monotonous message: Technical Difficulties/Please Stand By.

Towards five-thirty the picture changed. A man in a ski mask appeared on the screen sitting at the news desk. He appeared nervous, and his eyes kept wandering as though he wasn't exactly sure where the cameras were. Then he faced forward and addressed his unseen audience: "We members of the Alpha Group, have expropriated Station KCVO to make an important announcement to the people of San Francisco and all the USA. But as we lack experience in broadcasting, the six o'clock news will go on as usual. Only we shall be the authors of the news tonight. Please stay tuned."

Although the camera remained focused on the news desk, the man in the ski mask faded from sight.

It was then that Harry had an inspiration. He went back to the blueprints and studied them on his own. But they didn't tell him what he wanted to know: where the power hookup was located.

He got on the phone and, acting on his own authority, contacted an executive on duty with Pacific Gas & Electric. The executive was aware of the situation and was agreeable to helping out in any way he could. He would have to know precisely where the cables and circuitry were situated, naturally, but he believed that it was possible to cut the power without going inside the building itself.

"You see if you can get on it immediately, will you?"

The executive assured him that he would. And true to his promise, a utility van appeared within fifteen minutes.

There was one other thing to check out. He returned to Joe Lewiston who was trying to suppress a hacking cough which he was exacerbating with his cigarettes. "Is there any emergency generator on the premises that you know of?"

The station manager said that while one had been planned, none had yet been installed because of budgetary cutbacks. Which was all that Harry wanted to hear.

The blueprints clearly showed that there was an entrance through the rooftop down into the station's executive suite. Three floors further down, one would come to the newsroom. Harry believed that if it was done right, the police could storm the occupied station at the exact same moment the electricity was cut off. In the confusion, the terrorists would lose control over the situation and, maybe, be overwhelmed, without loss of innocent lives.

Of couse, Harry wasn't thinking so much of the twenty-five innocent lives which were at stake, although he did not dismiss their importance. In truth, his mind was on only one innocent life, Ellie Winston's.

Bressler and Connelly were dubious about his scheme. While they didn't object to electricians going down into manholes to determine how the electricity was being delivered to KCVO, they were not convinced that severing the power would give the police the advantage they were seeking.

Harry reminded them that the people who held KCVO and its staff had not hesitated to fire on patrolmen without provocation nor to demolish an airport terminal when it was crowded with mid-morning travellers. There was no reason to believe that they would spare their hostages now, even if all their demands were met.

"Look," he said desperately, "let me go up there. I'll have a two-way radio with me. If I can get in, and it seems possible, I'll let you know. If it doesn't seem possible, or I get killed, which amounts to the same thing, you'll know about that too. And if it's a go we'll coordinate it with the electricians and you can have your men ready just as soon as the power's cut."

Connelly grudgingly conceded that there was some possibility of success. Not much, but some.

Bressler obviously would rather not have this responsibility thrust on him. He checked with the Commissioner who, however, was unavailable, having left that morning for a vacation in Hawaii. Evidently, the absence of terrorist incidents during the past couple of weeks had convinced him that he could afford to take some time off without fear of missing another crisis.

Well, he was missing another crisis.

"Why wasn't I told he was going on vacation, the son of a bitch," Bressler said dolefully. Then he regarded Connelly. "You think it's worth a try?"

"It's your show, but it could be my ass. Yeah, I think it's worth a try."

"All right. Check with the electricians, find out the soonest they can shut off the juice," he instructed one of his men. Then to Harry he said, "You don't get air sick, do you?"

"Not that I know of."

"OK, I'll radio one of the choppers to come down and pick you up. We should have you up on the roof by the time they go on the air. Then it'll be up to you."

CHAPTER

Fifteen

The Small Man stood over her, casually pointing a Mark 1 handfiring device, a terrifying-looking instrument with its long smooth barrel and noise suppressor attachment. Having removed his mask because he found it too hot and uncomfortable, the Small Man seemed to be an oddly vulnerable and earnest young man of the sort that Ellie would have been attracted to when she was a student at Berkeley. He had a vaguely exotic appearance that promised evenings of romantic stories and passionate lovemaking. She wondered how he had turned into a terrorist who was prepared to kill without thinking twice. His voice was familiar to her and she was almost sure she had heard him over the phone: one of the voices claiming responsibility for blowing up the terminal at San Francisco Airport. And his face, too, was familiar. She had the feeling she had seen him somewhere before—but where?

The document that the Small Man had given her to read was loony and impossible. She was to go on the air in ten minutes' time and deliver this manifesto, or whatever it was, word for word to the city and probably the country since this dramatic event was likely to be picked up by all three networks and public broadcasting. If she survived this she might be so well-known that she could walk into NBC or CBS Monday morning and have her choice of jobs.

But the contents of this manifesto did not give her much hope of surviving. The Alpha Group was demanding a total of five million dollars in order "to carry on the liberation effort on a global basis." Of this money, more than two-thirds was to be provided to "oppressed peoples and freedom-fighting movements," which would, of course, be chosen by the directors of Alpha. Predictably, it also called for the U.S. Government to free certain so-called political prisoners from prisons around the country and to guarantee safe passage for the terrorists to a "socialist republic to be designated upon the completion of negotiations." Hostages would be released at various stages of these negotiations, concluded the document, "or else executed as an example." It did not say as an example of what, but Ellie got the idea. She did not know whether she could summon the courage to go through with this, pronouncing what might be her own death sentence.

Yet what choice did she have? Moreover, the lives of her friends and colleagues, nearly thirty of them in all, depended on her.

As far as she could judge, there were six men and one woman involved in the takeover: most of them had taken up positions at the exits and stairwells, one held the hostages at bay with two automatics —evidently he was ambidexterous—while the Small Man concentrated on rehearsing her for the upcoming news broadcast. Although the staff members of the station way outnumbered the terrorists, resistance would have been foolhardy. These were newspeople, editors, secretaries, cameramen, and soundmen, not trained urban guerrillas. And here she had thought after her adventures in Beirut and El Salvador that once back in San Francisco at her news desk she would finally be safe. At that moment, she remembered Harry. What, she wondered, was he doing now?

Harry was making his way torturously down a cable dangling over the roof of the KCVO building. The chopper hovered right overhead, making a tremendous dip and causing the air to churn about its bulbous body.

The cable didn't extend all the way down to the surface of the roof, obliging Harry to jump. It wasn't much of a drop but he landed clumsily. For several moments, he lay on the asphalt, until he ascertained that his limbs were all in working order.

By the monstrous air conditioning unit and water cooler that rose on stilts from the roof, Harry located the trapdoor that would lead him down into the building's interior. It was right where it was supposed to be. And it was locked.

Prepared for this eventuality, Harry attached a small timing device to it and waited until the second hand on his watch had completed two revolutions. The detonation was muffled. Unless one were a few feet away from it, one would have heard nothing.

The trap door opened with no problem. Harry signaled to the command post on Kearny that he was about to go in. The radio he gripped in his hand diminished Bressler's voice, and made it sound tinny and unreal.

"Harry, the electricians have everything set up. Our men are in position. So we're ready to go when you are. They should be on the air in three minutes."

"OK, going in now."

Lifting the trapdoor, he peered into the gloom. The entire building had been evacuated after the takeover. Those fortunate enough to

escape had had no wish to linger about for the excitement.

An aluminum ladder brought him down into a corridor. At the far end a flourescent light had been left on. In its buzzing glare Harry could see a succession of offices, all with their doors closed.

Because there were lights over the elevators indicating at which floor the elevator currently was, Harry was compelled to use the stairwell to move from floor to floor. Otherwise, he was sure to alert the terrorists to his presence.

It all depended on how many terrorists there were. If they were limited to about six, as was thought, then there was no way they could keep an eye on the hostages and cover all the exits and the stairwells too. Harry just hoped that the reports were correct; should any fighting break out before he reached the sixth floor and the newsroom, his plan would be ruined.

In a whisper, he informed the command post that he was now on the seventh floor, that he had encountered no opposition. Although he didn't say it, what really disturbed him was just how silent it was, as if the hostages and their captors had managed to pull off a disappearing act. But he recalled that since it was a television station, it had been designed to muffle extraneous noises.

"They've started broadcasting, Harry," Bressler said. "We've got the Winston woman on our screens now. She's reading their proclamation."

"How does she seem?"

"Holding her own, I'd guess."

"I'll let you know when I get to the door."

He began to advance down the final set of stairs, but it took him a while to do this as he was intent on maintaining silence. He had to be scrupulous about the sound every one of his footsteps made.

He leaned over the railing, just for a second, then slipped back into the shadows. A man was stationed on the door, a Chinese Type 66 automatic cradled in his arms. Harry waited, hardly daring to breathe, hoping he had not been spotted. But upon looking down again, he realized that he was still secure; the terrorist was undisturbed, even a little bored.

Harry drew out a four-inch "Moray" blade from his inside jacket pocket, which was where most of his small, but ingenious, arsenal was contained. Then he tossed down one of the timing devices. It made a sudden sharp noise, landing a few feet in front of the terrorist.

He raised his eyes, searching for the source of this strange object, but Harry had removed himself from sight. Then, warily, he

approached the device, stooping down to inspect it. Until he had it in his hand, he might have thought it a chunk of plaster that had fallen from the ceiling.

By the time he comprehended what it was, Harry had crept down the stairs and come up behind him. He turned, ready to cry out, but with one hand Harry sealed his lips, with the other he slit his throat. The terrorist retched, then as his eyes filmed over, Harry allowed him to collapse.

He now affixed the timing device he'd used as a distraction, and a second one for good measure, to the door of the newsroom.

Softly into his radio he communicated to Bressler: "All right, I'm on six, one man eliminated, no problem here. Ready to go in two minutes, repeat two minutes, at signal, if you are ready down there."

Several tense moments went by without a response. Harry presumed they were deliberating; this was not an easy decision to make.

Finally Bressler said, "We read you, Harry. That's two minutes on go. You are clear for go. Repeat: You are clear for go. Signal is Zero-Alpha. Repeat: Signal is Zero-Alpha. I will give you a count of five, followed by the signal. That will begin the two minute count. Is everything understood?"

"Understood. Just tell me, how is Ellie doing?"

"She's still reading. You wouldn't believe how long this goddamn proclamation goes on for. We've initiated a phone conversation with one of the terrorists, but we're getting nowhere with him. You ready?"

"Ready."

"Five-four-three-two-one . . . Zero-Alpha."

"Zero-Alpha." Harry started the timers going and stepped away.

He took out his .44, steeling himself for the confrontation that was now less than two minutes away. Above him, a rectangular white fixture bathed the stairwell in a ghostly light. These electricians better have their act together, he thought, because if the timers went and the light remained on, he would be in a whole lot of trouble.

"You have forty-five seconds?" Bressler inquired over the radio.

"That's right," Harry confirmed.

"You got a vacation coming after this," he said, maybe to buoy his spirits.

"Damn right I do. Thirty."

"Mark thirty."

He felt like an astronaut ready to be shot into space. Well, he might

be shot, but not; necessarily into space.

"Fifteen."

"Fifteen," said Harry. "Ten." He stepped further back from the door and raised his .44 slightly higher in his hand. "Five, three, two, one."

The detonations were not much louder than they'd been on top of the roof, but here in the stairwell, they seemed deafening. Harry was so conscious of the noise that for a second he failed to notice that the light above his head had gone out. The juice had been cut, and precisely on time.

He hurtled his body against the door which swept open for him.

A burst of gunfire greeted him in the darkness. Everywhere there was shouting and the rattle of automatics though it was impossible to say from where it was coming.

Harry was a shadow, a ghost, and the man doing the firing managed only to hit the door. Harry responded in kind, aiming in the direction of the fire. He heard a scream and saw a figure fall with a final, useless spasm of gunfire as his coda.

He got down immediately. The terrorists were shooting wildly, but as the police came streaming through other access points, they were hardpressed to know where to sight their weapons. Glass began to shatter as rounds impacted, inadvertently, against T.V. monitors and computer screens that were now as black as slate. The hostages were screaming and diving for cover, taking refuge under desks and editing machines.

Harry crawled between the legs of a table and beheld a man firing at random, apparently venting his frustration by firing on anyone he could see, caring little whether his victim was an officer or a hostage. In the darkness, he might hit one of his own.

Harry ended his spree abruptly by putting a .44 round in his chest. He pitched back and attempted in his last moments of life to return the fire, but hadn't the strength. He collapsed and died.

Almost from the start, the Small Man comprehended what was happening, and cursed the fate that had taken such a deadly turn. As soon as the lights went and the monitors died, he realized that he would not survive; certainly he did not care to spend the rest of his days incarcerated. His only recourse, he believed, was to take out as many of the hostages and as many police officers as he could, and die in a truly revolutionary manner. In a way, he had always longed for such a destiny.

His first victim was right in front of him. Or at least she was until the lights were extinguished. When he next looked, he saw she'd fled

into the darkness. There was no opportunity at the outset of the invasion to search for her. He had to turn his attention to the invaders. Doors were opening throughout the floor as the police came barreling in.

Concentrating on just one of these entrances, he kept discharging his Mark 1, bringing down two officers, then a third. His advantage lay in the silence of his weapon. In the darkness, they couldn't be sure where their opponent was, and the Small Man was quick and agile enough to keep switching his position just in case.

Next to him, he caught sight of Machito. Machito was half-concealed behind a computer terminal and his face contained a vast smile, for the truth was he was enjoying this last stand.

"We are showing them, aren't we?" he called to the Small Man. "We are showing them all right!"

His voice must have given his location away. There was a spurt of automatic fire from his left, and then from his rear. He looked vastly surprised, though no less exultant, and when he opened his mouth to tell the Small Man that he'd been shot, blood frothed out. There was another shot and the left side of his ugly face vanished in blood and he toppled back to the floor.

It was then that the Small Man glanced around and spied Ellie. She was running toward a man, calling out his name. "Harry! Harry!" he heard her shouting.

They were within a foot or two of each other when the Small Man sacrificed his cover, stood up, and fired his Mark 1 three times in rapid succession.

He saw her running. He told her to get down. She seemed not to hear him. Then she gasped and began to sink to the floor. He caught hold of her and as he did his hands became soaked with the blood eddying out of her. There was so much blood, so much.

Her eyes widened, she whispered something to him, he couldn't hear, he leaned closer. "Ellie, don't die," he said. But she did.

The Small Man was attempting to slip out of the newsroom. But Harry kept his eyes fixed on him and fired just once. The Small Man, his skull shattered, his brains strewn over the wall in back of him, seemed to fly into the air, but unable to continue his journey, dropped unceremoniously to the ground, Alpha Group's final sacrifice to the cause. Whatever cause that might have been.

CHAPTER

Sixteen

The address was in a fashionable district of the city, not far from the Borghese Gardens. It was a mild afternoon at the end of a Roman summer, full of brilliant light. The shops were just reopening after the usual protracted siesta, and wherever Harry went people were beginning to show signs of renewal after avoiding the fierce midday heat in sleep.

Against all rules and regulations, Harry had taken from the KCVO newsroom two items that would ordinarily be considered state's evidence. One was the address book that Harry had found on the body of one of the terrorists, the second was a Mark 1 handgun that he had found on the body of another. In the confusion, the absence of these objects went unnoticed.

His colleagues were surprised by his decision to vacation in Scotland. Harry had told them that he wanted to do some hunting although it was thought that he hunted enough while he was on the job. He mentioned nothing about Rome. He made certain that his passport was not stamped when he entered Italy. He had the gun smuggled in for him by a man who was good at that sort of thing. No questions asked.

And now he was on the Via Condotti, gazing up at an ornate marble façade that must have dated back to the Renaissance. It was possible that the man he wanted was no longer here, or had yet to arrive, but that was of minor importance. Harry had time, he would just keep extending his vacation as long as necessary.

It was no surprise to find limousines, vast Cadillacs and Bentleys, parked in front of the villa. Seeing them there heartened Harry. It implied that important business transactions were being discussed within. He certainly hoped so.

He had naturally taken pains to disguise himself. No one would ever recognize him; a tall bearded man would be how people would describe him later on. Besides, there would inevitably be an abundance of suspects. His quarry no doubt had more enemies than he could count.

In an operation like this, he possessed more patience than he

ordinarily would have. He waited until after dark, and waited some more until the men with the attaché cases and the bodyguards got into their limousines and drove away, and waited some more, until the entire district began to close down, and only the late night cafés were still doing business. He waited until there were very few lights on in the villa, and then he broke in through a window.

It triggered off a very loud alarm and alerted two men who immediately appeared to investigate, flicking on the lights to reveal a room full of crystal chandeliers and priceless paintings hanging in gilt frames. Seeing Harry, they asked no questions, but opened fire. Their bullets demolished an antique table and decapitated the top of what looked like a very expensive vase.

With the Mark 1, Harry put an end to their careers. The halls reverberated with the sounds of footsteps and panicky voices.

There were a great many rooms in this villa and Harry got himself lost in a number of them before he stumbled on the one he wanted.

The man was already out of bed. His face reflected not fear so much as irritation, as though Harry represented a minor nuisance he should never have had to bother with.

“I don’t know you,” he protested when Harry burst in on him. He was clad in his bathrobe. In the light from his bedlamp, he looked older than Harry had remembered, but again he’d never gotten a very good look at him in the warehouse.

“No, but I know you and that’s what counts.”

He raised the gun.

“I don’t know what you want, but if it’s money . . .”

It wasn’t money.

There was a commotion in the hallway right outside the door. Instinctively, Harry shot his eyes back.

Russell Cravitch grabbed for something, it might have been a gun, it might have been a lighter, Harry didn’t know, didn’t care, because he whipped about, muttering at the same time, “This is one of yours, you should know what it does to people,” before pulling the trigger of the Mark 1 and blowing open Cravich’s heart.

No one outside the door ever heard; the sound suppressor was that good.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DANE HARTMAN was a Warner Books imprint pseudonym used by two American novelists, Ric Meyers and Leslie Alan Horvitz. "Hartman" was credited as the author of the Dirty Harry action series based on the “Dirty” Harry Callahan character of the popular 1970’s and 1980’s films starring Clint Eastwood.

Following the release of the third Dirty Harry movie, The Enforcer, in 1976, Clint Eastwood made it clear that he did not intend to make any more Dirty Harry movies. In 1981, Warner Books (the publishing arm of Warner Bros., which made the films) began publishing a number of men's adventure series under its now-defunct "Men of Action" line. One such series features the further adventures of Inspector Harry Callahan. The series was brought to an end when Eastwood decided to direct, produce, and star in a fourth Dirty Harry movie, Sudden Impact, which was released in December 1983.

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